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Actor Mohan booked for assaulting scribe

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Gukesh & Ding draw in game 13 ahead of nail-biting finish

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Railway Bill gets LS nod amid fears of privatisation

NEW DELHI, 11 DEC

Despite disruptions, Lok Sabha on Wednesday passed The Railways (Amendment) Bill 2024 with the government insisting that it will not lead to the national carrier's privatisation.

The amendment primarily grants statutory powers to the Railway Board and was introduced by Union Railways Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw.

The Bill adds provisions granting the Central government authority to determine the composition of the Railway Board, including the number of members, their qualifications, experience, and terms of service. It is aimed at enhancing the overall functioning and independence of the Railway Board.

Additionally, it now empowers the Centre to approve the operation, expansion, or rerouting of superfast trains through Thawe Junction in Bihar. This includes rerouting the Arunachal Express (Train No. 22411/22412) via Siwan, Thawe, Kaptanganj, and Gorakhpur.

Responding to a debate on the Railway Amendment bill, Railway Minister Ashiwni Vaishnaw said in the Lower House that a fake narrative was set afloat that the amendment would privatise railways.

The Railways (Amendment) Bill 2024 was introduced in the Lok Sabha during the previous Parliament session. —*PTI*

'Gentleman politician' SM Krishna receives a tearful goodbye

DyCM DK Shivakumar bids a tearful goodbye to ex-CM and former EAM SM Krishna as he was cremated on Wednesday with full State honours in Mandya's Somanahalli. Chief Minister Siddaramaiah presents the tricolour, which had been draped over Krishna's body, to his wife Prema Krishna. The ceremony included a gun salute from the police. As Vedic hymns were chanted by a group of priests, Krishna's grandson, Amartya, lit the pyre, which was composed of 1,000 kg of sandalwood.

PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD ***>>>More on Page 2***

Misri tells Parl, B'desh will act against attack on Hindus

After trip, Foreign Secy assures Parl of action against accused

People in Thane protest against the alleged atrocities on minorities in Bangladesh on Wednesday ***PHOTO: PTI***

NEW DELHI, 11 DEC

Bangladesh has assured action against perpetrators of violence against minorities in that country, Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri told the parliamentary standing committee on External Affairs led by Congress MP Shashi Tharoor on Wednesday, according to sources.

Sources said several MPs asked Misri about the status of former Bangladesh prime minister Sheikh Hasina's stay in India. However, Misri's reply to the queries was not immediately known.

Misri is also understood to have told the panel that contrary to media reports, Bangladesh's interim government head Muhammad Yunus did not talk about review of any bilateral agreements with India.

Tharoor is said to have asked Misri about the possibility of MPs going to Bangladesh.

The possibility of the panel visiting Bhutan was also explored during the meeting.

India had on Monday flagged "regrettable incidents" of attacks on the minorities in Bangladesh at a meeting in Dhaka between the foreign secretaries of the two countries, where Dhaka called it "misleading and false information" and said no country should interfere in its internal affairs.

Misri had told reporters that he conveyed India's concerns, including those related to the safety and welfare of minorities, during his meeting with his counterpart Mohammad Jashim Uddin.

This was the first foreign secretary-level meeting between New Delhi and Dhaka after the fall of the Sheikh Hasina government on August 5 following massive protests against her government.

"We also discussed some regrettable incidents of attacks on cultural, religious and diplomatic properties," Misri had said.

"We expect, overall, a constructive approach on all these issues by the Bangladesh authorities and we look forward to moving the relationship forward in a positive, forward-looking, and constructive direction," he added. India has repeatedly expressed concern over the targeting of Hindus since the interim government of Muhammad Yunus took charge in early August. —*PTI*

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LS, RS see no business as spats take front seat

NEW DELHI, 11 DEC

The Day 13 of Winter Session of Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha was adjourned again after TMC's Kalyan Banerjee and BJP's Jyotiraditya Scindia got in to a war of words in the Lower Houser.

The Rajya Sabha was adjourned yet again as protests erupted from both the treasury and opposition benches over slogans linking "Sonia-Soros" and "Adani-Modi."

Lok Sabha witnessed repeated adjournments as remarks by Banerjee against Scindia created an uproar which refused to die down despite apology tendered by the TMC member.

Finally, the chair adjourned the House for the day.

Trouble arose when Banerjee was speaking during a discussion on the amendments to the Disaster Management Act.

The TMC member alleged non-cooperation by the central government during the 19 pandemic, but Minister of State for Home Nityanand Rai countered it, saying it was Prime Minister Narendra Modi who helped all the states and successfully handled the crisis by taking everyone along. Rai also alleged that the West Bengal government tried to put hurdles in the transportation of Covid vaccines . Rajya Sabha proceedings were adjourned without transacting any business amid uproar over the no-trust notice against the House Chairman and the George Soros issue. —*PTI*

Signal and Telegram spreading online radicalisation: Govt

NEW DELHI, 11 DEC

PHOTO: FREEPIK

The use of secured messaging applications like Signal, Telegram, Viber and the dark Web besides end-to-end encrypted WhatsApp by radical elements to connect with like-minded individuals is proving to be a "major challenge" for security agencies to counter online radicalisation, government said on Wednesday.

Replying to a question in the Rajya Sabha, Minister of State for Home Affairs Nityanand Rai said as the extensive use of cyber technology is the main tool for propagating radical ideology, cyberspace is being monitored ceaselessly.

The Minister said NIA is investigating 67 cases relating to online radicalisation. In these cases, 325 accused were arrested, 336 accused were chargesheeted and 63 accused were convicted so far.

He said websites and accounts involved in communal and anti-India propaganda affecting the sovereignty and integrity of India are being identified and sent to the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) for action.

During 2024, MeitY has issued directions for blocking 9,845 URLs (which also include radical content) till October 2024, he said.

He said the CBI, as National Central Bureau for India, continues to be engaged with INTERPOL for combating Online Radicalisation. —*PTI*

Sanjay Malhotra takes charge as RBI's 26th Guv

MUMBAI, 11 DEC

Sanjay Malhotra on Wednesday took charge as the 26th Governor of the Reserve Bank of India. Malhotra, a career bureaucrat, arrived at the central bank's headquarter this morning, where he was welcomed by senior RBI staffers. Malhotra, who recently served as the Revenue Secretary, signed the documents to take the charge of the important institution that performs a variety of roles. Malhotra, an IAS officer of the Rajasthan cadre comes at the helm of RBI at a very critical juncture, where growth and inflation balance has "unsettled" as per his predecessor Shaktikanta Das. —*PTI*

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'No possibility of Cong-AAP tie-up for Delhi polls'

NEW DELHI, 11 DEC

AAP Supremo Arvind Kejriwal on Wednesday once again ruled out the possibility of an alliance with the Congress for the Delhi Assembly polls, amid reports that the two parties could join hands for the election in the capital. In a post on X, Kejriwal said AAP will contest the election on its own strength in Delhi. Earlier this month also, Kejriwal had ruled out the possibility of an alliance between his party and the Congress for the Delhi election. The recent buzz over an alliance between the two Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) partners was fuelled by the cancellation of the Congress's "Nyay Chaupal" event scheduled for Wednesday.—*PTI*

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M'rashtra erupts as replica of 'Constitution' wrecked

CHHATRAPATI SAMBHAJINAGAR, 11 DEC

Prohibitory orders were imposed in central Maharashtra's Parbhani city on Wednesday, as violent protests rocked the city for the second day over the vandalising of a replica of the Indian Constitution, police said.

Amid a strike called by Ambedkar activists, a mob resorted to arson and the district collector's office was vandalised, officials said.

Prohibitory orders were imposed in the city and a company of the State Reserve Police Force was called in to help maintain law and order, said an official.

A glass-encased cement replica of the Constitution outside Parbhani railway station, close to a statue of Dr BR Ambedkar, was found damaged on Tuesday, sparking protests.

Even though police arrested a man in connection with the incident, protests continued on Wednesday morning.

"PVC pipes outside a shop were set ablaze today. As the mob became violent, police fired tear gas and dispersed them," said acting Superintendent of Police Yeshwant Kale.

Hundreds of protesters, including women, barged into the collector's office and damaged furniture and window panes before police could bring the situation under control, said Inspector General of Police Shahji Umap. The protesters had planned to hand over a memorandum to the collector and return peacefully, but some of them vandalised signboards of shops and CCTVs along the way, besides burning tyres on the road, he said. —*PTI*

LABOUR MINISTRY SAYS

Withdraw PF from ATMs soon

PHOTO: FREEPIK

NEW DELHI, 11 DEC

Starting next year, Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) subscribers will be able to withdraw their provident funds directly from ATMs, said Labour Secretary Sumita Dawra on Wednesday.

The Labour Ministry is upgrading its IT systems to provide enhanced services to the country's massive workforce, he said.

"We are settling claims quickly and are working to make the process easier to improve the ease of living. A claimant, beneficiary or insured person will be able to access their claims conveniently through ATMs, with minimal human intervention," Dawra said.

"Systems are evolving, and every two to three months, you will notice significant improvements. I believe there will be a major enhancement by January 2025," she said.

The EPFO has over 70 million active contributors.

The Labour Secretary also emphasised the government's efforts to improve EPFO services to enhance the ease of living.

Regarding plans to extend social security benefits to gig workers, Dawra said progress was at an advanced stage but refrained from specifying a timeline.

"A lot of work has been done, and we have outlined a scheme that is now in the finalisation process," she said. These benefits could include medical health coverage, provident funds, and financial support in cases of disability.

A committee comprising representatives from various stakeholders has been established to propose a framework for providing social security and welfare benefits to gig and platform workers.

Gig and platform workers were defined for the first time in the Code on Social Security, 2020, which was enacted by Parliament. —*PTI*

INDIA EVACUATES 75 NATIONALS FROM SYRIA

NEW DELHI, 11 DEC

India evacuated 75 of its nationals from Syria two days after rebel forces overthrew President Bashar Assad's authoritarian government.

The evacuation, coordinated by the embassies of India in Damascus and Beirut, was put into effect following an assessment of the security situation, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said. "The evacuees included 44 'zaireen' from Jammu and Kashmir who were stranded at Saida Zainab. All Indian nationals have safely crossed over to Lebanon and will return by available commercial flights to India," it said. The MEA said the government accords the highest priority to the safety and security of Indian nationals abroad. "Indian nationals remaining in Syria are advised to stay in touch with the Indian Embassy in Damascus," it said. —*PTI*

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Explosion in Afghan capital kills Taliban refugee minister

ISLAMABAD, 11 DEC

A suicide bombing in the Afghan capital on Wednesday killed the Taliban Refugee Minister and two others, officials said, in the most brazen attack on a member of the Taliban inner circle since they returned to power three years ago. The explosion struck inside the ministry, killing Khalil Haqqani, officials said. His last official photo showed him at a meeting chaired by the deputy prime minister, Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, earlier Wednesday. Khalil Haqqani is the uncle of Sirajuddin Haqqani, the acting Interior Minister who leads a powerful network within the Taliban. Haqqani was the most high-profile casualty of a bombing in Afghanistan since the Taliban returned to power. —*PTI*

Gun salute during the State funeral of former chief minister SM Krishna at Somanahalli in Maddur on Wednesday; Chief Minister Siddaramaiah pays his last rites; (below) Krishna's wife Prema Krishna pays respect at SM Krishna Residence, Sadashivanagar in Bengaluru

PHOTOS: SALAR

SM Krishna cremated with full State honours

Meanwhile, Vokkaliga leaders urge State government to name a road after Krishna

MANDYA, 11 DEC

Ex-chief minister and former external affairs minister SM Krishna was cremated on Wednesday with full state honours in his ancestral village Somanahalli in this district.

The 92-year-old veteran politician, who had also served as the Maharashtra Governor, died at his residence in Bengaluru on Tuesday after prolonged illness.

Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, his deputy and Krishna's relative D K Shivakumar, Central and state ministers, several MLAs, MPs, opposition BJP and JD(S) leaders and top government officials in the state were present during the final rites.

Along with them, the pontiff of the Adi Chunchanagiri Math Nirmalanandanatha Swamiji along with others paid respect.

Krishna's wife Prema, daughters Malavika and Shambhavi too paid their homage with teary eyes.

The mortal remains of SMK, as Krishna was fondly addressed, was brought to the venue in a palanquin decorated with flowers.

His body was wrapped in the Indian tricolour and decked with garlands. The police gave a gun salute to the departed leader.

Amid chants of Vedic hymns by a team of priests, Krishna's grandson Amartya lit the pyre comprising 1,000 kg of sandalwood.

Meanwhile, leaders from the Vokkaliga community, to which Krishna belonged, have urged the State government to name a prominent circle or main road in the city after him. The demand was made during a condolence program held in the city to honor his memory.

Former Mysuru-Kodagu MP Prathap Simha praised Krishna as a politician with a visionary approach, unmatched in the State. He credited Krishna's farsightedness for the realization of the Mysuru-Bengaluru four-lane road and the Outer Ring Road in Mysuru, and for laying the foundation for Bengaluru's growth in the IT-BT sector.

—Salar News with PTI

- Former Mysuru-Kodagu MP Prathap Simha praised Krishna as a politician with a visionary approach, unmatched in the State. He credited Krishna's farsightedness for the realisation of the Mysuru-Bengaluru four-lane road

German firm to set up plant in State

BENGALURU, 11 DEC

The State government has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with German bottling and packaging equipment manufacturer Krones, confirming the company's plans to establish a state-of-the-art manufacturing facility at Vemagal Industrial Park Phase 2 in the state. The MoU was signed in Germany, under the leadership of Minister for Large and Medium Industries MB Patil as part of the state's efforts leading up to Invest Karnataka 2025, the state's flagship Global Investors Meet scheduled in February. *—PTI*

State-level farmers convention on 23 Dec

MYSURU, 11 DEC

State farmers federation President Kurubur Shanthakumar announced on Wednesday that various farmers' organizations have decided to hold a state-level farmers' convention on 23 December, coinciding with World Farmers Day. The event will be held at the convocation hall of Karnataka State Open University in the city. Speaking to reporters, Shanthakumar said that federation will urge the Union government to withdraw its directive on using farmers' CIBIL scores as a criterion for distributing crop and other loans through nationalized, private, and public sector banks. *—Salar News*

NLSIU Bengaluru introduces 3-year BA Honours

BENGALURU, 11 DEC

The National Law School of India University, which has pioneered and developed an integrated five-year BA LLB (honours) degree that transformed Indian legal education, has now come up with a three-year (honours) BA course with an option of an additional fourth year.

The first cohort of the programme will be admitted in July 2025, the NLSIU said.

"We are looking to develop something that is responsive to 2025, but is completely different," the NLSIU Vice Chancellor Sudhir Krishnaswamy said at the launch of the programme.

According to the University, the course builds on existing faculty expertise that can be delivered without having to develop an entirely new faculty. *—PTI*

₹5L EX-GRATIA

3 bodies recovered in Murudeshwar tragedy

MURUDESHWAR, 11 DEC

The bodies of three out of four class nine girls who drowned in the Murudeshwar sea in Uttara Kannada district during an educational tour were recovered after post-mortem, police said on Wednesday.

Expressing condolences to the bereaved parents, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah announced an ex-gratia of Rs 5 lakh each to the families of the deceased students. He emphasise the need for greater caution during school trips.

A group of 46 students and six teachers from Morarji Desai Residential School in Mulabagilu, Kolar district, visited Murudeshwar on Tuesday as part of their school trip.

According to the police, around 5.30pm, the teachers and students went to the beach. Despite warnings from lifeguards, seven students ventured into the rough sea. Three girls were swept away by the current, while another girl died on the spot.

The remaining three students were rescued with the help of lifeguards and other agencies. They were immediately taken to the hospital and are now reported to be out of danger, a senior police officer said. A search operation involving lifeguards, home guards, fishermen, and police recovered the bodies. *—PTI*

CM pays last respects to ex-MLA Jayanna

MYSURU, 11 DEC

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Wednesday paid his last respects to mortal remains of former MLA S Jayanna at his newly built residence "Anugraha" near Mahadeshwara Government PU College in Kollegal town of Chamarajanagar district.

Former Kollegal MLA S Jayanna, passed away due to heart attack on Tuesday. Jayanna, was the Chairman of Karnataka State Warehousing Corporation. He had been elected to the Legislative Assembly twice- from Janata Dal in 1994 and from Congress in 2013.

A 21 round gun salute was provided by DAR police to the mortal remains of Jayanna. *—Salar News*

NGT seeks reasons for fresh water use at Chinnaswamy

NEW DELHI, 11 DEC

The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has asked the State Cricket Association why it was using fresh water for watering the turf at M Chinnaswamy Stadium in Bengaluru.

It had observed that around 75,000 litres of water was required at the stadium during IPL matches while there was a shortage of around 500 million litres per day (MLD) in Karnataka's state capital.

In its order dated November 26, a bench of NGT Chairperson Justice Prakash Shrivastava said that the association had filed a reply disclosing the different sources from where the water was obtained.

"A perusal of the report filed by Respondent number 4 (Karnataka cricket association) discloses that the respondent is using borewell (groundwater) for watering turf, which is the freshwater source," said the bench also comprising judicial member Sudhir Agarwal and expert member A Senthil Vel.

The tribunal noted that the association's counsel sought time to obtain instruction regarding the reason for using fresh water instead of water treated by a sewage treatment plant (STP). "Let the affidavit verifying the above aspect be filed within four weeks," it said. During the proceedings, the tribunal also noted that as per the reply, the association was not able to obtain the required quantity of municipal sewage to fully utilise the 200 kilo litre per day capacity STP installed by it.The matter has been posted for proceedings on 19 March. *— PTI*

Yaduveer performs son's cradle ceremony

MYSURU, 11 DEC

Titular king of Mysuru royal family, Mysuru-Kodagu MP Yaduveer Krishnadatta Chamaraja Wadiyar, along with his mother Pramoda Devi Wadiyar, wife Trishika Kumari and elder son Aadyaveer Narasimharaja Wadiyar, performed the rituals related to the birth of his younger son, in cradle, at Chamundeshwari temple in Chamundi Hill on Wednesday.

The Thottilu Shastra ritual was performed in the cradle tied to Sampige tree in the premises of the temple.

The rituals were performed by the Chief Priest of the temple Shashishekar Dixit.

Goddess Chamundeshwari is the family deity of Wadiyars of Mysore.

—Salar News

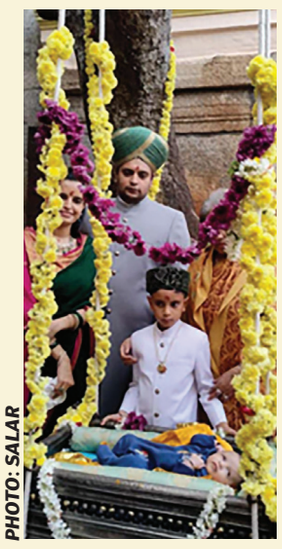


PHOTO: SALAR

Cases filed in Belagavi violence

BELAGAVI, 11 DEC

The Hirebagewadi police on Wednesday filed suo motu cases against five individuals who allegedly hurled stones at police officers on duty during the Panchamasali community rally in front of the Suvarna Vidhana Soudha on Tuesday evening.

The accused are Ningappa Bannad, Ramgouda Fakirgouda, Umesh Ingalewar, Manjunath Bendikeri, and Manjunath Gummagol.

According to Hirebagewadi police inspector RR Patil, the accused were also charged for damaging public property during the protest.

The stone-pelting incident left one inspector-grade police officer and 16 other officers injured. Additionally, five government buses and two police vehicles were damaged.

Protesters violated Dharwad High Court bench order prohibiting the blocking of highways

PHOTO: PTI

He explained that the protesters had violated a Dharwad High Court bench order prohibiting the blocking of highways, and the police took action to protect people from further violence.

However, Basavajaya Mrutynjaya Swamy of Kudalasangama Mutt claimed that police in plainclothes created chaos during the rally. He clarified that the High Court had not issued any orders related to the event, while the district administration had granted conditional permission, which the organizers had adhered to. He also demanded that the police cases filed against the community members be withdrawn. The Panchamasali community is advocating for its inclusion in the 2A reservation category. *—Salar News*

Vijayendra hits out at CM's Wayanad offer

BELAGAVI, 11 DEC

Expressing reservation over the State government's plans to purchase land for constructing houses for those affected by the devastating landslides in Kerala's Wayanad, BJP State President BY Vijayendra asked Chief Minister Siddaramaiah whether he was working for the people of Karnataka or the Gandhi family.

Highlighting infrastructural issues faced by Karnataka, he said the state deserves a leadership that prioritises its people and development, not one who sidelines the state's needs for political appeasement.

The Wayanad Lok Sabha seat is currently represented by Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi.

Her brother and Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi represented the seat earlier.

Siddaramaiah has written to his Kerala counterpart Pinarayi Vijayan, stating that his government is prepared to purchase land for constructing houses in Wayanad for families affected by the devastating landslide.

"Karnataka's roads have more potholes than tar, investments are slipping away to Telangana, North Karnataka remains neglected and unemployment is rising. Yet, CM Siddaramaiah, who earlier promised to build houses in Kerala, now wants to double down by buying land to facilitate this?" questioned Vijayendra in a post on X. *— PTI*

FAMILY DEMANDS JUSTICE

Dead man must speak: Techie wrote to Prez before suicide

BENGALURU, 11 DEC

The family of the 34-year-old techie who allegedly died by suicide here, has demanded justice for him and strict action against his harassers.

Atul Subhash, who worked for a private firm in the city, had left behind a 24-page purported death note, giving extensive details of what he alleged was years-long emotional distress of marital issues; multiple cases filed against him and harassment by his wife, her relatives, and a judge based in Uttar Pradesh, police said. A letter written to the President has emerged in which he criticised the justice system and highlighted a rising trend of false cases being filed against men by their estranged wives. "Given that speaking against the courts is impossible today for people who are alive, a dead man must speak," the three-page letter addressed to President Droupadi Murmu said. Meanwhile, his mother fainted at the Patna airport on Wednesday. Subhash's brother Bikas said, "I want my brother to get justice. I want this country to have a legal process through which even men can get justice. I want strict action against those who are sitting on a legal chair and doing corruption because if this continues then how will people expect justice."

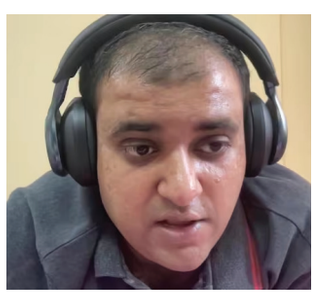


PHOTO: SCREENGRAB

Subhash's body was found hanging at his residence in the Manjunath Layout area, which falls under the Marathahalli police station limits, on Monday. A placard reading "Justice is due" was found in the room where he allegedly ended his life. Before taking to the extreme step, he recorded an over 80-minute video on Rumble, explaining the circumstances behind his decision. In the video, he can be heard saying, "I feel that I should kill myself because the money I earn is making my enemies stronger.

That same money will be used to destroy me, and this cycle will keep going."

In the video, which has now gone viral on social media platforms, Subhash can be heard saying, "I feel that I should kill myself because the money I earn is making my enemies stronger.

That same money will be used to destroy me, and this cycle will keep going."

Following Subhash's death, a case of abetment of suicide has been registered against his wife and her family members. *—PTI*

> **I think the time has come for us to review many family-related legislations and, wherever possible, introduce aspects of gender neutrality to protect both partners in a marriage. The family is... foundation of society**
>
> -Tejasvi Surya, BJP MP

> **The entire country is in shock. His video is heartbreaking. Fake feminism is condemnable. Extortion of crores of rupees was being done. Having said that, in 99% of marriage cases, it's the men who are at fault**
>
> -Kangana Ranaut, BJP MP

Oppn calls Dhankar biggest disruptor in RS

Opposition claims that VP's partisan behaviour led them to move notice seeking his removal

NEW DELHI, 11 DEC

Several Opposition parties on Wednesday said Rajya Sabha Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar's "partisan" conduct prompted them to move a notice for his removal as vice president and accused him of being the "biggest disruptor" whose conduct in the House has harmed the country's dignity.

Alleging that politics has taken precedence over rules in the Upper House of Parliament, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge said the chairman's conduct has been contrary to the dignity of the high post he holds.

Addressing a press conference at the Constitution Club here, Kharge alleged that Dhankhar is working as a government spokesperson and acting like a school headmaster, often sermonising experienced opposition leaders and preventing them from speaking in the House.

He also claimed that Dhankhar himself is responsible for the disruptions in the House, adding that the chairman openly encourages and provokes the members of the treasury benches to make outrageous comments against the Opposition, undermining the dignity of the House.

"This (behaviour) is not just a breach of protocol but a betrayal of the Constitution and the people of India," Kharge added.

Rajya Sabha Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar PHOTO: PTI

He said the Opposition parties have nothing against Dhankhar, "but he left us with no option but to go ahead with the notice for his removal".

"We appeal to the people of India to understand that this notice has been filed after thorough consideration and deliberations, with the sole purpose of safeguarding the Constitution and protecting the integrity of our parliamentary democracy," Kharge said.

TMC Rajya Sabha Deputy Leader Sagarika Ghose said the notice against the Rajya Sabha Chairman is not against an individual, but an attempt to save Parliamentary democracy.

Rajya Sabha has witnessed repeated adjournments for the past three days over the George Soros issue. —*PTI*

BJP alleges Soros & Nehru-Gandhi ties 'run deep'

NEW DELHI, 11 DEC

BJP on Wednesday intensified its attack on Congress, alleging that the connection between US-based billionaire George Soros and the Nehru-Gandhi family runs deep, extending beyond Sonia Gandhi's 'role' as co-president of the Forum of Democratic Leaders - Asia Pacific (FDL-AP).

In a post on X, the ruling party, citing media reports, said, "Fori Nehru, a Hungarian like Soros, was married to BK Nehru, Jawaharlal Nehru's cousin, making her the aunt of Rahul Gandhi."

George Soros is documented to have visited Fori Nehru and maintained extended correspondence with her and their association traces back to the time when BK Nehru served as India's ambassador to the United States, the party claimed.

"The connection between George Soros and the Nehru-Gandhi family runs deep, extending beyond Sonia Gandhi's role as co-president of Forum of Democratic Leaders," BJP charged. —*PTI*

Several Opposition MPs on greeted their BJP counterparts in Parliament premises with the tricolour in one hand and red rose in other; Rahul Gandhi offers rose, tricolour to Defence Minister Rajnath Singh (inset) PHOTO: PTI

RaGa meets Birla, seeks expunging of remarks

NEW DELHI, 11 DEC

Leader of the Opposition in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi met Speaker Om Birla on Wednesday and urged him to expunged remarks made by BJP MPs against him, and ensure the House functions smoothly.

Gandhi said BJP has been making "baseless" allegations against him to "distract" attention from the Adani issue, but he would not be provoked by any of these charges.

He also said he and his party wanted a discussion on the Constitution in Lok Sabha starting 13 December, and asserted they will ensure the House functions properly, even though it is not their responsibility.

"I had a meeting with the Speaker and I told him that our party is saying that derogatory comments against me be expunged. The Speaker said he will examine them. They (the BJP) continue to make all kinds of baseless allegations, but we have decided that we want the House to function.

"Whatever provocation they do, we will allow them. But we will try and run the House. We would want that somehow the House functions. We want there should be a debate and discussion. We want that there should be a debate on the Constitution on December 13," Gandhi told reporters outside Parliament. —*PTI*

Union Cabinet to meet today to discuss key issues

PHOTO: PTI

NEW DELHI, 11 DEC

Union Cabinet is set to meet today in the national capital to discuss key issues. On 25 November, the Cabinet led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi approved PAN 2.0. The Cabinet also approved three major railway projects aimed at improving connectivity and operational efficiency. Additionally, the Cabinet approved Atal Innovation Mission 2.0, designed to foster entrepreneurship and innovation among youth. Another notable decision was the introduction of the 'One Nation, One Subscription' initiative, aimed at making high-quality research materials accessible to students and researchers nationwide. —*ANI*

Chouhan bats for 'one nation, one election'

PHOTO: PTI

CHANDIGARH, 11 DEC

Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Wednesday said frequent polls were creating hurdles in the nation's progress, while making a strong pitch for the One Nation, One Election proposal by the Central government. Addressing an event in Kurukshetra as part of the ongoing International Gita festival, Chouhan said a glorious, prosperous and powerful India is being built under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Soon, India will become the "Vishwa Guru" (world leader) in front of our eyes. There is no doubt about it, and the whole world knows it, he said. "But there is one hurdle in India's progress and development, which is frequent elections," he said. —*PTI*

Manipur: 45 acres of illegal poppy crops destroyed, 2 held

IMPHAL,11 DEC

Forty-five acres of illegal poppy plantation were destroyed at Phungyar in Manipur's Ukhrul district and two persons arrested, police said on Wednesday. A combined team of the Ukhrul police, the BSF, forest department and the district administration carried out the operation in the Mapithel hill range on Tuesday, they said. Two persons identified as Letkhohao Haokip, 37, and Hegou Khongsai, 30, were arrested from the spot for their alleged involvement in the illegal cultivation, the officials said. Meanwhile, unidentified people on Wednesday kept a hand grenade in front of a private bank in Manipur's Imphal West district, police said on Wednesday. Passersby spotted the grenade on the stairs in front of the private bank at Singjamei and informed the police. —*PTI*

Pune: 4 held for murder of BJP leader's uncle

PUNE, 11 DEC

Four people have been arrested in connection with the abduction and murder of BJP MLC Yogesh Tilekar's uncle, police said on Wednesday, adding that the crime seemed to have resulted from personal enmity. Satish Wagh, 55, was bundled into an SUV near Shewalwadi Chowk in Hadapsar area of Pune city by four to five persons on Monday when he was out on a morning walk. He was found murdered near Yavat on Pune-Solapur Highway, 40 kilometres away, later that evening. The body bore multiple injury marks. As per the preliminary information, personal enmity led to the crime, he told reporters.—*PTI*

AAP National Convenor Arvind Kejriwal with party leaders, Delhi CM Atishi, Raghav Chadha, Sanjay Singh PHOTO: PTI

Kejri: No alliance with Cong for Delhi polls

NEW DELHI, 11 DEC

AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal on Wednesday once again ruled out the possibility of an alliance with the Congress for the Delhi assembly polls, amid reports that the two parties could be jointly contesting the elections.

In a post on X, Kejriwal said AAP will be fighting the election on its own strength in Delhi. His reaction comes amid media reports that the two parties were likely to have a tie up for the 70-member Delhi Assembly polls due in February.

Meanwhile, Delhi High Court on Wednesday posted on 17 January, 2025, the enforcement directorate's plea against the bail granted to former chief minister Arvind Kejriwal in the 2021-22 excise policy-linked money laundering case.

AAP delegation met Election Commission, accusing BJP of orchestrating a "mass voter deletion" conspiracy in Delhi ahead of the upcoming Assembly elections.

Addressing the media after the meeting, Kejriwal said they had submitted 3,000 pages of evidence to EC, alleging that BJP was engaged in a large-scale effort to remove votes of current residents.

Meanwhile, Supreme Court on Wednesday relaxed bail conditions of AAP leader Manish Sisodia which required him to report to the investigating officer twice a week in the corruption and money laundering cases related to the Delhi excise policy. —*PTI*

Whatever Iran needs is there in India, says Envoy

NEW DELHI, 11 DEC

Iran's Ambassador to India, Iraj Elahi on Wednesday said that India has all that Iran needs, and hence he plans to work to improve accessibility between both the countries.

Elahi, while attending the Iran Food Festival in the national capital told ANI that he was working with Indian officials to remove bottlenecks in the transfer of money in trade.

"I have studied the market of India and Iranian market. I always mention to my authority, my government that whatever Iran needs is available in India. But we should make it accessible. Accessibility means that we should remove the problem of transfer of money. We need to make different legal bases for our trade. So I am in close contact with the Minister of Trade of India, and I have planned a joint meeting with the Minister of Trade of Iran find a solution for the difficulties which is now and the bottlenecks for trade between two countries," he told ANI. —*ANI*

MAHARASHTRA POLLS

'Vote jihad' under ECI's scanner

MUMBAI, 11 DEC

The use of sensitive phrases such as "vote jihad" by some political parties in their campaigns for the recently-held Maharashtra assembly polls are under the scanner of the Election Commission of India (ECI).

Maharashtra Additional Chief Electoral Officer Dr Kiran Kulkarni on Wednesday said more than 650 cases of poll code violations were registered during the elections, and the enforcement agencies will take them to a logical conclusion.

"We should be very cautious with terms like 'vote jihad' because they have serious repercussions. The ECI is carefully analysing its implications across legal, linguistic and social domains before taking further action," Kulkarni said.

Kiran Kulkarni PHOTO: PTI

When asked if use of such phrases affected the election discourse, Kulkarni said, "Words and their references need to be defined and analysed thoroughly. There is no airtight legal framework for new terminology, so we must handle such matters carefully," he said.

Meanwhile, Maharashtra Congress chief Nana Patole on Wednesday compared India's democracy with that of Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka and said it was in danger and being discussed at the global level.

He said people in many cities and villages have also cast aspersions on the victory of Mahayuti alliance. —*PTI*

NCP(SP) MPs may switch loyalties, says BJP leader

MUMBAI, 11 DEC

BJP leader Pravin Darekar on Wednesday hinted that some MPs of the Sharad Pawar-led NCP (SP) could cross over to his party if development was priority.

Many Maha Vikas Aghadi MPs, especially those from the NCP (SP), represent constituencies where the BJP-led alliance won most seats in the assembly elections, he said.

"If development is their priority, with both the Central and State governments controlled by the BJP-led alliance, they may consider their political future carefully," Darekar said.

NCP (SP) leader Vidya Chavan dismissed Darekar's claims. "The Union government led by the BJP is a fragile alliance with leaders like Nitish Kumar and Chandrababu Naidu in it. They live in fear of losing their support, which is why they resort to such tactics," she said. —*PTI*

Cabinet expansion by 14 Dec

MUMBAI, 11 DEC

The cabinet expansion of the Devendra Fadnavis-led Maharashtra government is likely by 14 December, and the Shiv Sena is unlikely to get either the home or the revenue portfolio, a senior BJP leader, who did not wish to be named, said on Wednesday. Fadnavis has left for Delhi on Wednesday on a "courtesy visit" to meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi. —*PTI*

CM Vijayan has dictatorial mindset: Cong

KANNUR, 11 DEC

The Opposition Congress in Kerala on Wednesday accused the ruling CPI (M) of being "intolerant" towards other political parties and denying them the freedom to freely function even in the home village of Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan.

The Marxist party and CM Vijayan were acting with a "dictatorial mindset", which is unacceptable, Leader of Opposition VD Satheesan told.

Congress has charged the CPI(M) with "orchestrating the vandalism". Terming the incident as "highly unfortunate" and "condemnable", he said, "It was in the home village of Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan that the office of a political party was vandalised and set on fire." —*PTI*

I am indebted: Didi on leaders backing her as INDIA head

DIGHA, 11 DEC

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Wednesday thanked several senior leaders of the INDIA bloc for backing her as the leader of the non-BJP coalition.

Banerjee, who is on a three-day trip to the coastal town of Digha in Purba Medinipur district, told reporters that she would pray for the well-being of those leaders and the alliance.

"I am indebted to everyone for the respect they have shown to me. I pray for their good health. I want them as well as their party to stay well. I also want INDIA to stay well," Banerjee said.

Banerjee last week expressed her dissatisfaction with the functioning of the INDIA bloc and signalled her intent to take charge of the alliance if given an opportunity. Leaders of several of its constituents backed her, saying she should be allowed to lead the coalition.

PHOTO: PTI

Leaders such as NCP (SP) chief Sharad Pawar and RJD president Lalu Prasad, backed her.

While Pawar called her a 'capable leader', Prasad said that Banerjee should Mamta Banerjee should be allowed to head the INDIA bloc.

YSRCP Rajya Sabha MP Vijayasai Reddy has also said thatthe TMC supremo could handle INDIA bloc. —*PTI*

KEY PARTNERS SOON

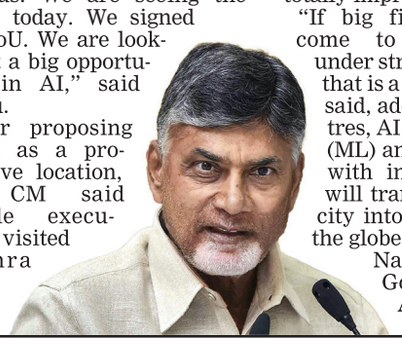
Google, Andhra eye AI future in Vizag

AMARAVATI, 11 DEC

Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu on Wednesday said global tech giant Google and Andhra Pradesh are eyeing a big Artificial Intelligence opportunity in Visakhapatnam.

Addressing a district collectors' conference at the secretariat, the CM said Google and the southern state have signed an agreement, which would catapult the port city's development.

"Recently when IT Minister (Nara Lokesh) went to America, he visited Google's campus. We are seeing the result today. We signed an MoU. We are looking at a big opportunity in AI," said Naidu.



After proposing Vizag as a prospective location, the CM said Google executives visited Andhra Pradesh's largest city for a firsthand survey and were totally impressed.

"If big firms like Google come to Visakhapatnam under strategic investment, that is a game changer," he said, adding that data centres, AI, machine learning (ML) and deep tech, along with internet sea cables will transform the coastal city into a service hub for the globe.

Naidu earlier said Google identified Andhra Pradesh as a key partner as part of its ambitious plans and operations in India.

After meeting a Google delegation at the secretariat here, the Chief Minister said he discussed various potential areas.

"I met a Google delegation led by VP (vice president) Bikash Koley in Amaravati today. The delegation offered an overview of their operations and shared their ambitious plans in India. I am proud that Andhra has been identified as a key partner, said Naidu in a post on X. —*PTI*

Bihar Cong seeks Muslim DyCM; strains RJD ties

PATNA, 11 DEC

Congress leader Shanawaz Alam fired a fresh salvo at Bihar ally RJD on Wednesday, saying his party would like to have "two deputy chief ministers, including a Muslim" if the coalition formed the next government in the state.

The AICC secretary, who is also the state's co-in charge, was criticised by the domineering ally for "violating coalition dharma" even as the ruling NDA chuckled at spat.

Alam told a gathering of Congress workers, "It is our resolve that if the next government is headed by Tejashwi Yadav, our party shall have two deputy CMs, one a Muslim and from upper castes."

The remark appeared aimed at reaching out to his party's traditional support base, which includes Muslims, upper castes and Dalits.

However, this did not sit well with the RJD, which has gained from the erosion of Congress' Muslim base and has been particularly upset by Alam's recent comment that the "strike rate in Lok Sabha polls" should be considered when finalising seat-sharing formula for Assembly elections. —*PTI*

BEST bus tragedy occurred due to human error: RTO

MUMBAI, 11 DEC

The Mumbai RTO officials have said they suspect "human error" and "lack of proper training" led to the horrific accident in Kurla where a BEST bus fatally knocked down seven persons and injured 42 others. Soon after the incident on Monday night, an investigation team of the Wadala Regional Transport Office (RTO) found that brakes of the Olectra-make electric bus were operating well. The e-bus operated by the civic-run Brihanmumbai Electric Supply and Transport (BEST) undertaking rammed into pedestrians and vehicles at around 9.30 pm on Monday on the S G Barve Marg in Kurla (West). Sanjay More , 54, who was at the wheel of the ill-fated bus, was later arrested. —*PTI*

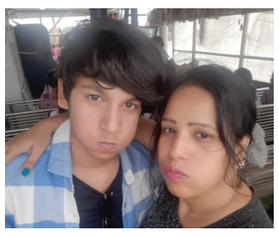


PHOTO: FB

Actor Sapna Singh's son found dead, 2 arrested

BAREILLY, 11 DEC

Actor Sapna Singh staged a protest in Bareilly after her 14-year-old son was found dead under suspicious circumstances, with police arresting his two friends over the case, officials said on Wednesday. She ended the protest on Tuesday after more than 90 minutes following police's assurance that action will be taken. Her son Sagar Gangwar's two adult friends -- identified as Anuj and Sunny -- were arrested and sent to jail on Wednesday on charges of murder, the officials said. —*PTI*

Air Force jawan dies by suicide while on duty

NAGPUR, 11 DEC

An Air Force sergeant allegedly took his own life by shooting himself while on duty here in the early hours of Wednesday, police said. Javeer Singh, 36, who hailed from Bhiwani in Haryana, shot himself in the head with his service weapon around 2am, said an official of Gittikhadan police station. The gunshot alerted fellow jawans at the Maintenance Command Center in Vayusena Nagar who discovered him lying in a pool of blood. The body was sent to a government hospital for post-mortem and investigation was underway, said the official. Singh's colleagues told police that he appeared to be stressed in the last two days. But the exact cause of the suicide was yet to be ascertained, the official said. —*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Race against time to save 5-year-old stuck in borewell

JAIPUR, 11 DEC

With more than 48 hours having passed since five-year-old Aryan fell into a 150-feet-deep borewell in Rajasthan's Dausa, rescuers are racing against time to pull him out safely. As they dig a parallel borewell to reach the child, National Disaster Response Force personnel say there are myriad challenges in the operation: the water level in the area may be around 160 feet, difficulty in capturing any movement of the child on camera due to steam underground, and then there are safety concerns for the staff as well. "The challenge is that we can go up to 150 feet and not beyond that. NDRF rescuers will go down with protective equipment to rescue the child," NDRF commandant Yogesh Kumar said. Aryan fell while playing in an agriculture filed. —*PTI*

SC questions Kerala temple for stopping ancient ritual

Guruvayur temple decided to halt ekadasi ritual to manage crowd

NEW DELHI, 11 DEC

The Supreme Court on Wednesday agreed to examine a plea against the Kerala High Court order in favour of the administration of the Guruvayur Sri Krishna temple in the state which decided to discontinue the ancient ritual of "udayasthamana pooja" on ekadasi.

A bench of Justices JK Maheshwari and Rajesh Bindal issued the notice to the Guruvayur Devaswom Managing Committee, Kerala government and others on the plea against the 7 December order. The top court, however, said the chart of daily pooja displayed on the temple's website should not be altered.

"We cannot intervene now. We will issue notice to the other side. Prima facie we are satisfied," the bench said.

Udayasthamana pooja refers to the various worship conducted in temples throughout the day from sunrise (udaya) to sunset (asthamana).

The temple administration recently decided not to conduct the ritual on ekadasi, citing difficulties over crowd management and the desire to allow more devotees time for darshan. The top court was hearing a plea filed by PC Harry and other members of the family with priestly rights in the shrine, contending that "ekadasi" was the most important festival of the temple and while it was an admitted fact that the age-old udayasthamana pooja was being conducted since 1972 on ekadasi day, in reality it was being performed from even before.

The petitioners said the rituals were streamlined by Adi Sankaracharya and it was believed any disturbance or deviation would impair the manifestations of the divine force or "Chaitanya". —*PTI*

Supreme Court said the chart of daily pooja displayed on the temple's website should not be altered **PHOTO: PTI**

SC asks TN to list steps for temple panel appointments

NEW DELHI, 11 DEC

The Supreme Court on Wednesday directed the Tamil Nadu government to spell out its proposed actions over the appointment of the "Arangavalar Committee" (trustee committee) for all Hindu temples in the state.

The direction came after the state government informed the apex court that it had sought applications for appointment of trustee committees from 31,000 temples and such panels were appointed in over 7,500 temples only as many were yet to respond.

The bench granted four weeks' time to the state government to file the affidavit and listed the plea of petitioner "Hindu Dharma Parishad" in February, 2025. — *PTI*

People block railway tracks during an agitation demanding a separate state of Cooch Behar at Jorai railway station on Wednesday **PHOTO: PTI**

Protest over another state halts WB trains

KOLKATA, 11 DEC

A rail blockade by agitators at West Bengal's Jorai railway station demanding a separate state of Cooch Behar led to the cancellation of two trains and diversion of several others on Wednesday, an official said.

The blockade by the Greater Coochbehar People's Association (GCPA) at Jorai railway station in Alipurduar division of Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) started at 6.45 am, and was withdrawn around 11.45 am, following which normal train movement was restored, he said.

The agitators said they were holding the "indefinite" rail blockade to press for their demand for the creation of 'Greater Coochbehar'.

Thousands of protesters had assembled at the station in the morning and blocked tracks, prompting the deployment of a large number of RPF, GRP and local police personnel to prevent any untoward incident, the NFR official said.

"Consequent upon the withdrawal, the track was inspected and given fit for train movement. Accordingly, normal movement of trains has been restored over that section," he said. — *PTI*

Naxal, BJP worker killed in Ch'garh

BIJAPUR, 11 DEC

A Naxalite was killed in an encounter with security personnel in Chhattisgarh's Bijapur district on Wednesday, police said.

Two security personnel also sustained injuries in an improvised explosive device (IED) blast triggered by Naxalites during the same operation, they said.

The gunfight took place in a forest of Munga village under Gangloor police station area when a team of the District Reserve Guard (DRG) was out on an anti-Naxal operation, a police official here said.

The operation was launched based on inputs about the presence of Maoists' divisional committee member Dinesh Modiam, company no. 2 commander Vella and other leaders along with 30-40 cadres in Munga area, he said.

The exchange of fire broke out when the patrolling team was cordoning off the area, he said.

After the gunfight stopped, the body of a Naxalite, one 9 mm pistol, one IED, six remote switches used to trigger IEDs and other Maoist-related material were recovered from the spot, he said.

Meanwhile, Naxalites have killed a 35-year-old BJP worker in Chhattisgarh's Bijapur district while claiming he was acting as a police informer, an official said on Wednesday.

This is the fifth murder of a civilian by Naxalites in the district in the last seven days.

The latest incident took place on Tuesday night when the deceased, identified as Kudiam Mado, was at his house in Somanpalli village under Farsegarh police station limits, the official said.

A group of Naxalites stormed into Mado's house, dragged him outside and strangled him to death, the police official said. A search operation has been launched in the area to trace the assailants. —*PTI*

'ABUSIVE AND FOUL LANGUAGE'

Actor Mohan booked for 'assaulting' scribe

HYDERABAD, 11 DEC

A case was registered against veteran Telugu actor Mohan Babu for allegedly assaulting a video journalist here, police said on Wednesday.

In his complaint, the journalist stated that when he visited Mohan Babu's Jalpally residence on 10 December to cover the ongoing "dispute" between the actor and his younger son Manoj, the senior actor confronted him and other journalists aggressively.

He allegedly grabbed the microphone, used "abusive and foul language," and attacked him with it, causing a head injury. Chaos erupted at Babu's residence on Tuesday night when Manoj, an actor, attempted to enter the house but was denied entry. He was later rushed to the hospital. During the commotion, the video journalist covering the incident was allegedly attacked.

TV visuals showed Mohan Babu trying to hit the journalist with a microphone.

Telugu actor Mohan Babu grabs the microphone of a journalist while she was covering a story on his family rift **PHOTO: SCREENGRAB**

Condemning the "attack," media personnel protested on Wednesday, demanding an apology from In a related development, Mohan Babu and his two sons, Vishnu and Manoj, were served notices under Section 126 BNSS to appear before the Rachakonda Commissioner of Police on December 11 for a "probable breach of peace".

The differences within Babu's family became public on 9 December after he lodged a police complaint, alleging that Manoj and his wife had "orchestrated" a plan to take possession of his Jalpally home through intimidation and force. However, Babu reiterated that his fight was for "self-respect and the safety of his wife and children." — *PTI*

'Welcome' actor Mushtaq kidnapped near Meerut

BIJNOR, 11 DEC

Actor Mushtaq Khan, best known for his roles in films like 'Welcome' and 'Stree 2' was allegedly kidnapped on the pretext of being invited to an event in Meerut, police said on Wednesday. The actor managed to escape after being held captive for a day.

Khan was kidnapped by two men after being taken by a Scorpio vehicle. They held Khan captive and transferred around Rs 2 lakh from his mobile. Khan managed to escape and return to Mumbai on 21 November. Kidnappers used Khan's phone to make purchases in Meerut and Muzaffarnagar. —*PTI*

PHOTO: X

Sikh preacher booked for rape and murder

CHANDIGARH, 11 DEC

Punjab Police has registered a case against Sikh preacher Ranjit Singh Dhadrianwale in a 2012 case of alleged rape and murder of a woman in Patiala, the Punjab and Haryana High Court was informed.

The FIR was lodged on a complaint filed by the victim's brother, a Patiala resident.

Sikh preacher Dhandrianwale, who heads Parmeshwar Dwar gurdwara, a dera in Shekhupura village in Patiala, has a large following in Punjab and among the Punjabi diaspora abroad.

Dhadrianwale, in a video message, said he would cooperate with the police investigation.

"They (the family) have moved the high court. They have a doubt and they should clear their doubt. The high court has said investigate the case after registering the FIR. It may take some time but the truth will come out. I have full faith in the high court and the Punjab Police," the Sikh preacher said.

The DGP's affidavit came after the victim's brother alleged that his sister was raped and murdered. He further alleged that no action was taken by police at the time of the incident.

The woman was found in an unconscious condition outside the gate of gurdwara Parmeshwar Dwar on 22 April, 2012. She later died at a hospital before she could make any statement, according to the affidavit of the DGP.

The mother of the victim then had not raised suspicion against any person for the death of the woman.

A postmortem report revealed that the death was caused due to poisoning by aluminum phosphate insecticide.The woman's brother had alleged that he was threatened by some persons not to raise his voice against Dhadrianwale.

Subsequently, another complaint was filed by the woman's brother which was forwarded to the Patiala Senior Superintendent of Police on October 16, 2024

The affidavit said that a case has been registered against Dhadrianwale on the complaint of the petitioner and the case is under investigation. —*PTI*

Sikh preacher Ranjit Singh Dhadrianwale **PHOTO: X**

Wife's morphed pic circulated over ₹2,000 loan, Andhra man ends life

HYDERABAD, 11 DEC

Humiliated by morphed photos of his wife being sent to his friends and family members by loan app agents, a young man has ended his life in Andhra Pradesh, reigniting concerns over how such criminal and inhumane steps are being used by such loan givers.

The deceased Narendra, 25, had an intercaste love marriage with Akhila on 28 October.

To meet his expenses, Narendra had taken a loan of Rs 2,000 from an app. Within weeks, the loan app agents started harassing him for repaying the loan, sending abusive messages.

The agents also sent morphed photos of his wife - along with a price quote on the image - to his friends and family members who were on his contact list. When the images landed on Akhila's phone, she told her husband and was informed about the loan.

The couple then decided to repay the entire amount, but that did not help. The harassment continued.

Heartbroken and humiliated over the incident Narendra ended his life on Tuesday, just over six weeks after tying the knot. —*Agencies*

India to triple atomic power capacity by 2031

NEW DELHI, 11 DEC

India's atomic power capacity has almost doubled in the past decade from 4,780 megawatts to 8,081 megawatts and it would be tripled by 2031, Union Minister Jitendra Singh said on Wednesday.

Responding to a question in the Lok Sabha, Singh who holds key portfolios in the Prime Minister's Office, including the Department of Atomic Energy and the Department of Space, emphasised the transformative strides made since 2014.

"When this government came into power, the total power generation capacity was 4,780 megawatts. Today, in 2024, it stands at 8,081 megawatts. This means that the capacity developed in the last 10 years equals what was achieved over the previous 60 years," he said. Singh projected that by 2031-32, the generation capacity would triple, reaching 22,480 megawatts. He attributed this progress not only to technical expertise but to a shift in political will. "We always had the talent and capacity, but what was missing, perhaps, was the enabling milieu provided by political leadership," he said.

He acknowledged that one project in Tirunelveli remains on hold, contributing to delays in capacity expansion in the state. Singh also highlighted the peaceful applications of atomic energy, as envisioned by Homi Bhabha. —*PTI*

Jitendra Singh **PHOTO: PTI**

IN HER 'BEST INTEREST'

HC allows abortion at 26 wks for gangrape victim

- Referring to an SC judgment related to a similar case of, the HC said it has the power to order the medical termination of pregnancy under Article 226 of the Constitution of India

GUWAHATI, 11 DEC

The Gauhati High Court has permitted the abortion of a 15-year-old gangrape victim, currently 26-week pregnant, from Assam's Tinsukia district in her "best interest".

Taking a suo motu cognisance of a media report, a division bench of Justice Kalyan Rai Surana and Justice Susmita Phukan Khaund on Monday asked the state government to carry out a "medical termination of pregnancy" of the unwanted foetus and submit a status report by December 19.

According to the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971, (MTPA) termination of pregnancy of over 24 weeks is not allowed.

The order said that according to a news article on 29 November, the victim was 14 years old when she was gangraped by seven persons, including four minors in Tinsukia.

Hearing the case (WP(C)(Suo Moto)/1/2024) on 5 December, the court constituted a medical board and a district-level committee in accordance with the MTPA to examine the victim as to whether it would be appropriate to have the unwanted pregnancy terminated, with special emphasis to the risk involved in such a procedure. The medical board in its report said the girl is "fit to undergo any obstetrical procedure".

Referring to a Supreme Court judgment in April this year related to a similar case of Maharashtra, the Gauhati HC said it has the power to order the medical termination of pregnancy under Article 226 of the Constitution of India.

Accordingly, the court directed to constitute a team of expert medical practitioners to undertake the medical termination of pregnancy of the minor at a facility in Tinsukia. —*PTI*

According to the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971, termination of pregnancy of over 24 weeks is not allowed **PHOTO: PIXABAY**

PROTEST ON

Thousands of farmers protested in London on Wednesday, some driving tractors to demand the scrapping of an inheritance tax that they say will destroy family farms and threaten food production
PHOTO: PTI

Protesting farmers are on the move again over MSP

Protesting farmers in clashed with police over the weekend as they attempted to march towards New Delhi. The march reinvigorated a long-standing movement demanding government guarantees on crop prices.

On Sunday, farmers were met with tear gas and water cannons as they tried to breach police barricades on the border of Punjab and Haryana states in northern India. Eight protesters were reported injured.

Security has been tightened, while internet service has been blocked locally in Haryana by authorities who say they want to prevent the spread of misinformation in nearby villages around the protest site.

A cloud of tear gas enters a crowd at the Shambhu barrier, a border crossing between Punjab and Haryana statesA cloud of tear gas enters a crowd at the Shambhu barrier, a border crossing between Punjab and Haryana states

The violent clashes were reminiscent of the massive protests over new farm laws in 2020 and 2021, during which hundreds of thousands of farmers camped on the outskirts of New Delhi.

The protests eventually pushed the government of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi to abandon three bills that were aimed at overhauling India's agricultural economy.

Farmers unions at the time said the bills would have allowed large corporations to set the prices of crops, thereby endangering farmers' income. At the core of the farmers' demands was a legal guarantee of a "Minimum Support Price," (MSP) for certain essential crops, which protects farmers from price drops.

After the laws were withdrawn in 2021, government pledged to set up an advisory panel comprising government officials and farmers to chart a path to ensuring minimum prices for crops.

However, farmers say the government is not doing enough after multiple meetings failed to bear fruit.

The violent clashes were reminiscent of the massive protests over new farm laws in 2020 and 2021, during which hundreds of thousands of farmers camped on the outskirts of New Delhi ***PHOTO: PTI***

As a result of the faltering negotiations, the farmers have been camped out at Shambhu and Khanauri border points between the two north Indian states since February 2024.

This time around, aside from MSP guarantees, the farmers are demanding a range of measures from the government to ensure the financial feasibility of farming. This includes a farm debt waiver, pensions for farmers and farm laborers, and no hike in electricity tariffs.

On Friday last week, Indian Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan told parliament that the government had fixed MSPs of crops to allow least 50 per cent returns to farmers and will purchase all farm produce at these rates.

The farmers are now planning their next move after being stopped by police from marching on Delhi. Their cause was boosted after India's Supreme Court refused to act on a petition calling for the protesters to be cleared from national and state highways in Punjab..

Since 26 November, to keep the pressure up, another farmer leader, Jagjeet Singh Dallewal, has been on a fast-unto-death at the Khanauri border.

Agriculture is a critical sector in India, employing a significant portion of the population and contributing around 15 to 20 per cent to the GDP, although this share has been declining.

According to recent government figures, approximately 260 million people in India are employed in agriculture, which accounts for over 45 per cent of the country's workforce. This statistic is supported by data from the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), which indicates that the share of workers in agriculture has increased to over 46 per cent as of 2024, up from 42.5 per cent prior to the Covid pandemic.

A key problem is ensuring income for smallholders, farmers who cultivate marginal or small holdings of less than two hectares (just under five acres) of land.

Smallholders face various production risks including climate-related issues like droughts and floods, which disproportionately affect their yields compared to larger farms. The reliance on rain-fed agriculture further aggravates these challenges.

Indra Shekhar Singh, an independent agriculture policy analyst, told DW the government must address the long-standing grievances of the farming community with sufficient targeted spending.

"The farmers' protests represent a new reality. The hunger strike and tear gassing of peacefully protesting farmers is creating public sympathy for them. What is brewing right now is a warm-up," said Singh.

—DW News

LETTERS write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

SALAR سالار

Hindu exodus from B'desh unlikely: Nobel laureate

The current and evolving situation in Bangladesh is unlikely to trigger a fresh round of exodus of minority Hindus into India, Nobel laureate economist Abhijit Banerjee said.

Historically, the academic explained, migration is mainly driven by social networks and economic opportunities, rather than persecution, even in the context of the crisis faced by minorities in Bangladesh.

Speaking exclusively to PTI during his recent visit to the city to participate in a curtain-raiser event of the 16th edition of the Apeejay Kolkata Literary Festival, where his latest title 'Chhaunk: On Food, Economics and Society' was launched, Banerjee said he felt India's "explicit political preference for Hindu migrants from Bangladesh" is what prompted the population to leave their homeland in the past, rather than the attacks on the community.

"People always leave for another country where they have their families or to a richer nation where the economic opportunities are higher," the Nobel laureate said, "I am not surprised that Hindu Bengalis have left Bangladesh and settled in, say, large pockets of Assam because of India's overt preference for Hindus instead of Muslims."

"I am not saying that persecution would, under no circumstances, lead to exodus on a large scale. But it's a presumption I don't agree with. The reasons for mass migration have been widely documented by both economists and sociologists across the globe. Persecution has never been the primary determinant. I would actually like to see some data on that before passing a judgement," he continued.

'Chhaunk', Banerjee's latest work, is a cookbook with a difference.

Part memoir, part cookbook, 'Chhaunk' playfully uses food explore themes of economics, society, and India. The book makes unexpected connections, such as linking savings with shami kebab and women's liberation with the Bengali dish 'ghonto', as described on its cover.

Replete with corresponding illustrations by French illustrator Cheyenne Olivier, her second collaboration with Banerjee after 'Cooking to Save Your Life' and the one following Nobel laureate economist and Banerjee's spouse Esther Duflo's 'Poor Economics for Kids', 'Chhaunk' sprinkles ideas of social sciences around desi recipes akin to spicing up the dishes to add extra flavour.

"Food is a great way to make lighter conversation about big issues," Banerjee smiled.

Taking that idea forward, the academic agreed that the migration of the elite Hindus from Dhaka over the past many decades has changed the food culture in that city, just as it has for the average Bengali household in an urban Indian hotspot like Kolkata.

It is estimated that around 10 million East Bengali refugees had fled to Indian territories on account of conflict during the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War. Displacement of Bengalis on both sides of the border had a severe demographic and long-lasting political impact in India during the 1947 partition of Bengal when an estimated 2.2 million Bengali Hindus left then East Pakistan to West Bengal while some 1.9 million Bengali Muslims were forced to cross the border for a reverse exodus.

In the 77 years since Independence, the Hindu population in Bangladesh has dropped from 22 per cent to less than 8 per cent, mainly due to mass exoduses and on account of sustained crossing over of refugees, mostly Hindus, during the interim period citing persecution.

Bangladesh shares over 4,000 km of land border with India, more than half of which is with West Bengal and the remaining length running past the four North Eastern states of Tripura, Assam, Meghalaya and Mizoram.

"The scale of migration in 1971 was created because the armed forces of multiple nations were involved. I don't think non-crisis migration can ever reach that scale," the Nobel laureate said. According to him, Indians have been relatively ineffective in using food as a form of "soft power" to influence geopolitics.

"For example in the West, both in Europe and the US, Japanese techniques of cooking are widely adapted and used whereas Indian styles of cooking are used by a handful of non-Indian chefs only in pockets in the UK," he explained.

Speaking of the challenges in illustrating for an unconventional cookbook which has more than its fair share of economics, just the way she wanted the book to be, French illustrator Cheyenne Olivier said non-specificity of the essays to a particular time or place made her job different from what she did in the past.

"This was the opposite from what I had been illustrating in the previous books," she said. *—PTI*

People protest against the alleged atrocities on Hindus in Bangladesh ***PHOTO: PTI***

Trump vows to end birthright citizenship: How will it affect India?

US president-elect Donald Trump has promised to end birthright citizenship as soon as he gets into office to make good on campaign promises aiming to restrict immigration and redefining what it means to be American.

But any efforts to halt the policy would face steep legal hurdles.

Birthright citizenship means anyone born in the United States automatically becomes an American citizen. It's been in place for decades and applies to children born to someone in the country illegally or in the US on a tourist or student visa who plans to return to their home country.

It's not the practice of every country, and Trump and his supporters have argued that the system is being abused and that there should be tougher standards for becoming an American citizen.

But others say this is a right enshrined in the 14th Amendment to the Constitution, it would be extremely difficult to overturn and even if it's possible, it's a bad idea.

During an interview on Sunday on NBC's "Meet the Press" Trump said he "absolutely" planned to halt birthright citizenship once in office.

"We're going to end that because it's ridiculous," he said.

Trump and other opponents of birthright citizenship have argued that it creates an incentive for people to come to the US illegally or take part in "birth tourism", in which pregnant women enter the US specifically to give birth so their children can have citizenship before returning to their home countries.

"Simply crossing the border and having a child should not entitle anyone to citizenship," said Eric Ruark, director of research for NumbersUSA, which argues for reducing immigration. The organisation supports changes that would require at least one parent to be a permanent legal resident or a US citizen for their children to automatically get citizenship.

Others have argued that ending birthright citizenship would profoundly damage the country.

"One of our big benefits is that people born here are citizens, are not an illegal underclass. There's better assimilation and integration of immigrants and their children because of birthright citizenship," said Alex Nowrasteh, vice president for economic and social policy studies at the pro-immigration Cato Institute.

There are around 4.8 million Indian-Americans in the US, with 1.6 million of them born in the country. They would no longer have proof of citizenship under Trump's new proposal ***PHOTO: PTI***

According to experts a large number of US citizens could be affected if the policy were to change. For instance, Pew Research estimates that there are approximately 4.8 million Indian-Americans living in the US, with 1.6 million of them born in the country. These individuals would no longer have proof of citizenship under the new proposal.

In 2019, the Migration Policy Institute estimated that 5.5 million children under age 18 lived with at least one parent in the country illegally in 2019, representing 7 per cent of the US child population. The vast majority of those children were US citizens. The nonpartisan think tank said during Trump's campaign for president in 2015 that the number of people in the country illegally would "balloon" if birthright citizenship were repealed, creating "a self-perpetuating class that would be excluded from social membership for generations". In the aftermath of the Civil War, Congress ratified the 14th Amendment in July 1868. That amendment assured citizenship for all, including Black people.

But the 14th Amendment didn't always translate to everyone being afforded birthright citizenship. For example, it wasn't until 1924 that Congress finally granted citizenship to all Native Americans born in the US.

A key case in the history of birthright citizenship came in 1898, when the US Supreme Court ruled that Wong Kim Ark, born in San Francisco to Chinese immigrants, was a US citizen because he was born in the states. The federal government had tried to deny him reentry into the county after a trip abroad on grounds he wasn't a citizen under the Chinese Exclusion Act.

But some have argued that the 1898 case clearly applied to children born of parents who are both legal immigrants to America but that it's less clear whether it applies to children born to parents without legal status or, for example, who come for a short-term like a tourist visa.

Some proponents of immigration restrictions have argued the words "subject to the jurisdiction thereof" in the 14th Amendment allows the US to deny citizenship to babies born to those in the country illegally. Trump himself used that language in his 2023 announcement that he would aim to end birthright citizenship if reelected.

Trump wasn't clear in his Sunday interview how he aims to end birthright citizenship.

Asked how he could get around the 14th Amendment with an executive action, Trump said: "Well, we're going to have to get it changed. We'll maybe have to go back to the people. But we have to end it."

Pressed further on whether he'd use an executive order, Trump said "if we can, through executive action."

He gave a lot more details in a 2023 post on his campaign website. In it, he said he would issue an executive order the first day of his presidency, making it clear that federal agencies "require that at least one parent be a US citizen or lawful permanent resident for their future children to become automatic US citizens".

Trump wrote that the executive order would make clear that children of people in the US illegally "should not be issued passports, Social Security numbers, or be eligible for certain taxpayer funded welfare benefits".

Trump could steer Congress to pass a law to end birthright citizenship but would still face a legal challenge that it violates the Constitution. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

Indian jailed for importing 58 tortoises into S'pore

SINGAPORE, 11 DEC

An Indian national was sentenced to a year and four months' jail for unlawfully importing 58 Indian star tortoises into Singapore in August, a media report said on Tuesday. The tortoises were concealed – sealed and not ventilated – in Abdul Jaffar Haji Ali's personal luggage when he arrived at Changi Airport on 29 August from India to take another flight to Jakarta. Ali, 40, pleaded guilty on Monday of unlawfully bringing into Singapore the Indian star tortoises, categorised as 'vulnerable' by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). One of the tortoises was dead while 22 others were later assessed to be "thin", according to the report. Ali had received those tortoises from his friend identified as 'Bhai' in court documents, who helped with all the logistical arrangements for the trip, including paying for his flight and arranging his accommodation. In return, Bhai asked Ali's help to transport a piece of packed luggage to Jakarta. *—PTI*

Philippine VP skips hearing over threats to Prez

MANILA, 11 DEC

The Philippine Vice President on Wednesday skipped the first hearing into threats she made against President Ferdinand Marcos Jr, saying she did not believe the investigation will be fair. Vice President Sara Duterte was subpoenaed to appear before the National Bureau of Investigation but instead sent her lawyer, who submitted a letter saying their client vehemently "denies having made any threat constituting grave threat" under the law. Duterte has tried to walk back her comments in a 23 November online news conference where she publicly threatened Marcos, his wife and House Speaker Martin Romualdez with death. She later said it was rather an expression of concern for her own safety, claiming to have received death threats. Marcos and Duterte have fallen out since winning the 2022 election. The two offices are elected separately in the Philippines, which has resulted in rivals occupying the country's top political posts. *—PTI*

US, Israel conspired Assad govt's fall in Syria: Iran

Khamenei accuses 'a neighbouring nation' of allying with US

TEHRAN, 11 DEC

Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said the recent events in Syria, including the fall of its government, were part of a joint plan by the United States and Israel, state TV reported Wednesday.

"We have evidence, and this evidence leaves no room for doubt," he said.

The Supreme leader, without naming a country, added: "A neighbouring state of Syria has played a clear role in this matter, and it continues to do so."

Iran said it wants to maintain relations with Syria but that Opposition groups' approach towards Israel would be crucial, Al Jazeera reported.

On Tuesday, Iran government's spokesperson Fatemeh Mohajerani called for "respect for Syria's territorial integrity" and said the Syrian people should decide their own fate.

Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei speaks during a meeting in Tehran, Iran on Wednesday *PHOTO: PTI*

Speaking about Iran's future relations with Syria, she said, "their distance from the Zionist regime" would be an important deciding factor.

Hossein Salami, the Commander-In-Chief of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), said that no Iranian forces currently remain in Syria.

Arguing that this withdrawal did not mean Tehran's power had been diminished, Salami said Iranian forces were present in Syria until the last moments of al-Assad's government. Tehran has not commented on reports that it has established a direct line of dialogue with the armed groups that toppled Syria's ruling family, which was allied with Iran for more than 40 years. Before Assad fled, Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi repeatedly called the attacks, led by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) in Syria, an "American-Zionist ploy" aiming to destabilise the region amid the fallout of the Israeli war on Gaza, as per Al Jazeera. Meanwhile, stating that Israel has "no intention of interfering" in Syria's internal affairs, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has warned to take "necessary" measures if the current regime allows Iran to re-establish itself in Syria or transfers weapons to Hezbollah. Syria on Wednesday issued a statement urging unity in the country as it transitions away from the Assad government's administration of Syria. The spokesperson said that Syria needed efforts of its people in the times to come. *—Agencies*

MARTIAL LAW ROW

S Korean Prez faces raids, ex-minister attempts suicide

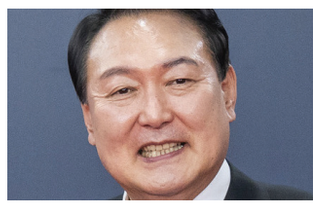
SEOUL, 11 DEC

South Korea's previous defence minister was stopped from attempting suicide while in detention over last week's martial law, officials said, as police were reported to be raiding President Yoon Suk Yeol's office Wednesday.

The main liberal opposition Democratic Party also plans to submit a new motion to impeach Yoon for his 3 December declaration that imposed martial law.

Yoon's ill-conceived power grab has paralysed South Korean politics, frozen its foreign policy, and rattled financial markets, greatly reducing his chances of completing his five-year term and casting a turbulent shadow over one of Asia's most robust democracies.

Shin Yong Hae, commissioner general of the Korea Correctional Service, told lawmakers that Kim is in a stable condition now.



Yoon Suk Yeol *PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA*

Kim was arrested on Wednesday after a court approved a warrant for playing a key role in a rebellion and committing abuse of power. Kim became the first person arrested over the martial law decree. Later in the day, National Police Agency Commissioner General Cho Ji Ho and Kim Bong-sik, head of the metropolitan police agency of the capital, Seoul, were detained. They are being investigated for their roles in deploying police forces to the National Assembly to block lawmakers from voting to lift Yoon's martial law decree. *—PTI*

Israeli soldiers stand on an armoured vehicle before crossing the security fence moving towards Israeli-annexed Golan Heights *PHOTO: PTI*

Israel bombs refugee shelter, kills 19 in Gaza

DEIR AL-BALAH, 11 DEC

Israeli strikes on the Gaza Strip killed at least 29 people overnight and into Wednesday, including one that hit a home where displaced people were sheltering in the isolated north, killing 19, according to Palestinian medical officials.

The Israel's assault on Gaza has raged on with no end in sight, even after Israel reached a ceasefire with Lebanon's Hezbollah and attention shifted to the overthrow of Syrian President Bashar Assad. Both the outgoing and incoming US administrations have said they hope to end the war before the inauguration but months of ceasefire talks have repeatedly stalled.

The strike that killed 19 occurred in the northern town of Beit Lahiya near the border with Israel, according to the nearby Kamal Adwan Hospital, which received the bodies. Hospital records show that a family of eight was among those killed, including four children, their parents and two grandparents.

The hospital said another strike near its entrance on Wednesday killed a woman and her two children.

Another strike in the built-up Nuseirat refugee camp in central Gaza killed at least seven people, according to the Awda Hospital. The dead included two children, their parents and three relatives, it said.

There was no immediate comment from the Israeli military. The military says it tries to avoid harming civilians and accuses militants of hiding among them, putting their lives in danger.

Militants in central Gaza meanwhile fired four projectiles into Israel on Wednesday, two of which were intercepted, the military said. The other two fell in open areas, and there were no reports of casualties. *—PTI*

Aid to North Gaza blocked for 66 days: UN

Humanitarian aid to North Gaza, where Israel launched a ground offensive on 6 October, has largely been blocked for the past 66 days, the United Nations has said. That has left between 65,000 and 75,000 Palestinians without access to food, water, electricity or health care, according to the world body. In the north, Israel has continued its siege on Beit Lahiya, Beit Hanoun and Jabaliya with Palestinians living there largely denied aid, the UN Office for Humanitarian Affairs said on Tuesday. *—PTI*

IRAN AND N KOREA TOO

Biden approves memo to help Trump on China, Russia

WASHINGTON, 11 DEC

President Joe Biden has approved a new national security memorandum that is meant to serve as a roadmap for the incoming Trump administration as it looks to counter growing cooperation among China, Iran, North Korea and Russia, the White House said Wednesday.

Biden administration officials began developing the guidance this summer. It was shaped to be a document that could help the next administration build its approach from day one on how it will go about dealing with the tightening relationships between the United States' most prominent adversaries and competitors, according to two senior administration officials.

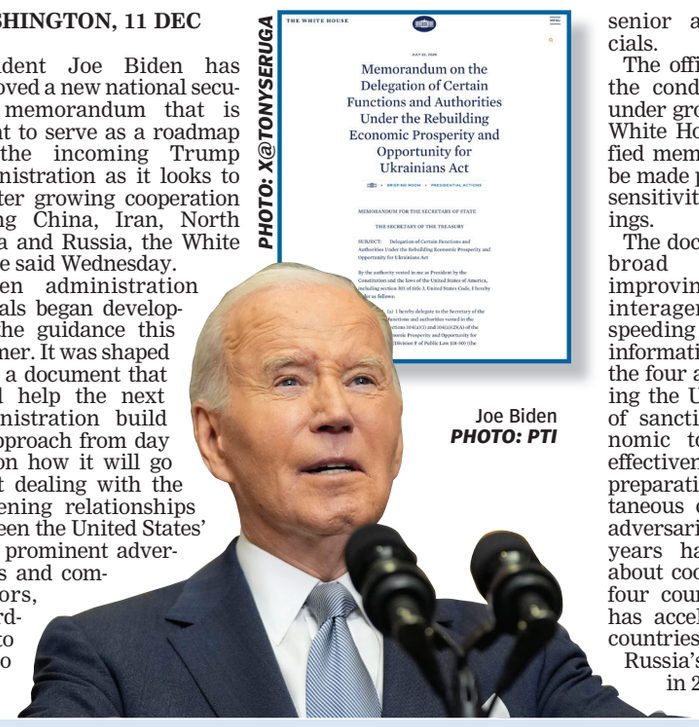


PHOTO: X@TONYSERUGA
THE WHITE HOUSE
Memorandum on the Delegation of Certain Functions and Authorities Under the Rebuilding Economic Prosperity and Opportunity for Ukrainians Act

Joe Biden *PHOTO: PTI*

The officials, who spoke on the condition of anonymity under ground rules set by the White House, said the classified memorandum would not be made public because of the sensitivity of some of its findings.

The document includes four broad recommendations: improving US government interagency cooperation, speeding up the sharing of information with allies about the four adversaries, calibrating the US government's use of sanctions and other economic tools for maximum effectiveness, and bolstering preparation to manage simultaneous crises involving the adversaries. The US for many years has been concerned about cooperation among the four countries. Coordination has accelerated between the countries in the aftermath of Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022. *—PTI*

US URGES INDIA, B'DESH TO MEND TIES

WASHINGTON, 11 DEC

The United States on Tuesday said that it wants India and Bangladesh to resolve their differences peacefully.

Responding to a question on the recent visit of India's foreign secretary to Bangladesh, US State Department spokesperson Matthew Miler said, "We want to see all parties resolve their disagreements peacefully." During his visit early this week, Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri conveyed New Delhi's "concerns" over the safety and security of minorities in Bangladesh. "I have underlined India's desire to work closely with the interim government of Bangladesh. At the same time, we also had the opportunity to discuss certain recent developments and issues," he said. *—PTI*

TRUMP PICKS FTC CHIEF, ENVOYS TO GREECE & TURKEY

American President-elect Donald Trump has named Andrew Ferguson as the next chair of the Federal Trade Commission (FTC). He will replace Lina Khan, who became a lightning rod for Wall Street and Silicon Valley by blocking billions of dollars' worth of corporate acquisitions and suing Amazon and Meta for alleged anticompetitive behaviour. It was one of several evening announcements Trump made on Tuesday via his social media platform, including that he was naming Kimberly Guilfoyle as Ambassador to Greece, a longtime supporter who was engaged to his son Don Jr., and ally and former inaugural chairman Tom Barrack as Ambassador to Turkey. *—PTI*

22 ARRESTED, 150 BOOKED FOR POST ON PAK ARMY

LAHORE, 11 DEC

Pakistani authorities have booked 150 suspects and arrested 22 of them, mostly belonging to Imran Khan's party, for allegedly propagating against the army on social media on the killings of the party workers in Islamabad on 26 November, an official said on Wednesday.

According to the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), at least 12 party workers were killed and hundreds wounded when law enforcers opened fire on the protesters in Islamabad on 26 November. It also claims that around 105 party workers have been missing since then.

Following the incident, Khan's supporters started blaming the Pakistan Army for opening fire on the peaceful protesters.

The Shehbaz Sharif-led government denied that the law enforcers opened fire on the protesters and pledged to take strict action against those propagating on social media.

The government formed a special task force headed by the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) chief to NAB such elements. *—PTI*

Taiwan blames 'troublemaker' China for drills

Photo: Taiwan Coast Guard

TAIPEI, 11 DEC

Taiwan on Wednesday demanded that "trouble maker" China end its ongoing military activity in nearby waters, which it said is unilaterally undermining peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait and disrupting international shipping and trade.

The Foreign Ministry, in a statement posted on its website, said it was responding in part to the activities of a "large number" of Chinese naval and coast guard ships in the first-island chain, the Pacific archipelago off the Asian continental mainland that includes Japan, Taiwan and part of the Philippines.

"The Ministry of Foreign Affairs solemnly demands that the Beijing authorities immediately stop military intimidation and all irrational activities that endanger regional peace and stability," the statement said.

Taiwan defence officials said they have detected Chinese ships since Monday, both off Taiwan and farther out along the first-island chain.

China restricted airspace off its southeast coast from Monday to Wednesday, an indication that it was planning to hold drills, but the country's People's Liberation Army has not confirmed whether it is doing so. *—PTI*

OPPOSES EXTRADITION

US CEO murder accused pleads 'not guilty'

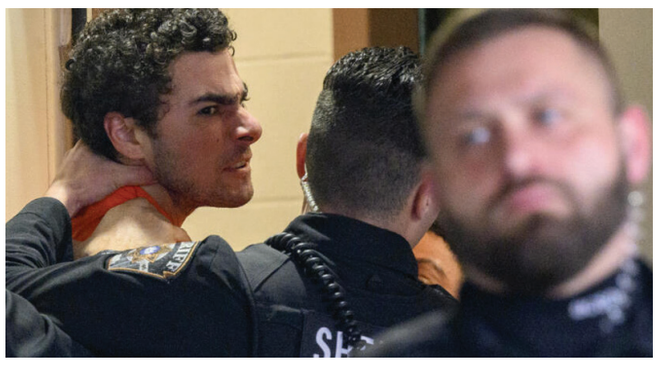
ALTOONA, 11 DEC

Luigi Mangione, the 26-year-old charged with shooting of United Healthcare CEO Bryan Thompson, will fight his extradition to New York and is expected to plead not guilty to charges against him there — his lawyer told reporters on Tuesday.

"I haven't seen any evidence that he's the shooter," the lawyer said.

Luigi made it clear on Tuesday that he would not make things easy on authorities, shouting unintelligibly and writhing in the grip of sheriff's deputies as he was led into court and then objecting to being brought to New York to face trial.

The displays of resistance on Tuesday weren't expected to significantly delay legal proceedings for Mangione. Little new information has come out about possible motivation, though writings found in Mangione's possession hinted at a vague hatred of corporate greed.



Suspect in the killing of UnitedHealthcare's CEO struggles and shouts while entering courthouse *PHOTO: X@MANZOORAQ*

In his first public words since he was arrested at a McDonald's in Pennsylvania after a five-day search, the 26-year-old Ivy League graduate from a prominent Maryland real estate family emerged from a patrol car, shouting about an "insult to the intelligence of the American people" while deputies pushed him inside a courthouse. A law enforcement bulletin said that at the time of his arrest, Mangione was carrying a handwritten document expressing anger with what he called "parasitic" health insurance companies and a disdain for corporate greed and power.

He wrote that the US has the most expensive healthcare system in the world and that profits of major corporations continue to rise while "our life expectancy" does not, according to the bulletin. Mangione remained jailed in Pennsylvania, where he was initially charged with possession of an unlicensed firearm, forgery and providing false identification to police. *—PTI*

IV contamination kills 17 children in Mexico

MEXICO CITY, 11 DEC

Authorities in Mexico on Tuesday said that a total of 17 children have died in central Mexico from suspected contamination of IV feeding bags.

David Kershenobich, the country's public health secretary, said 16 of the victims were underweight, premature babies being treated at hospitals. The other victim was 14 years old. Kershenobich said that two bacteria, including a multidrug-resistant bug, were suspected in the deaths.

Investigators say the bacterial contamination apparently happened at a plant in the city of Toluca that manufactured the IV nutrition mixture, and that the company had been temporarily shut down and use of the product had been halted.

The first infections were reported starting 22 November and the last was identified on 3 December. Around 20 other patients had been sickened by the infection and were being treated for it.

All 13 of the first deaths occurred at three government hospitals and one private one in the State of Mexico, on the outskirts of Mexico City.

Kershenobich said have authorities "detected other possible outbreaks with similar characteristics in Mexico State, which are under investigation." *—PTI*

PHOTO: X@JUSTDATAHUB

PHOTO:PTI

Rupee settles flat, near all-time low at 84.84

MUMBAI, 11 DEC

The rupee settled for the day on a flat note higher by just 1 paisa at 84.84 (provisional) against the US dollar on Wednesday, a tad above its all-time low level, amid rising expectations of a shift in the Reserve Bank's monetary policy stance post the appointment of Sanjay Malhotra as the new RBI governor. Forex traders said the Indian rupee touched a fresh all-time low of 86.87 in intraday trade as change of guard at the Reserve Bank of India raised odds of a rate cut by RBI in its February meeting. —PTI

Gold reclaims ₹80K mark; silver rally extends for 3rd day

MUMBAI, 11 DEC

Gold prices rallied to reclaim the Rs 80,000-level in the national capital on Wednesday driven by increased buying from jewellers and stockists, amid a strong global trend, as per the All India Sarafa Association. The precious metal of 99.9 per cent purity jumped Rs 620 to touch nearly a three-week high of Rs 80,400 per 10 grams. It settled at Rs 79,780 per 10 grams on Tuesday. Extending the rally for the third straight day, silver surged Rs 1,450 to hit a one-month high of Rs 96,300 per kg. Price of gold of 99.5 per cent purity climbed Rs 620 to Rs 80,000 per 10 grams on Wednesday. The yellow metal finished at Rs 79,380 per 10 grams. Silver, however, declined Rs 396, or 0.41 per cent, to Rs 95,129 per kg on Wednesday. —PTI

BEML gets ₹136 cr contract for high mobility vehicles

NEW DELHI, 11 DEC

State-owned BEML Ltd on Wednesday said it has secured a Rs 136-crore contract for the supply of indigenously designed High Mobility Vehicles (HMV) 8x8. These vehicles will play a pivotal role in the Battle Field Surveillance System (BFSS) project, reinforcing India's defence capabilities and advancing the government's vision of Atmanirbhar Bharat, the PSU under the Ministry of Defence said. Manufactured at BEML's facilities, the HMV 8x8 is designed to deliver exceptional reliability and versatility, even in the most challenging environments. Key features of these vehicles include an independent suspension system, a high-power air-cooled engine, a central tyre inflation system, an anti-lock braking system and a backbone tube design. —PTI

OYO opens new hotel in Rajasthan every 2-3 days: CEO

JAIPUR, 11 DEC

Travel tech platform OYO is onboarding a new hotel every 2-3 days in Rajasthan and plans to set up a back office in the state to support its overseas business, according to a top official of the company. Speaking at the Rising Rajasthan Summit on Tuesday, OYO CEO Ritesh Agarwal further said that around 1 lakh customers book its hotel everyday across India and around the same number of customers stay in its hotel everyday overseas as well. "We are opening a new hotel every 2-3 days. We get a lot of business from overseas. We are setting up a back office of overseas business in Rajasthan because we are getting good talents for technical, finance etc," Agarwal said. He said that the winter season is going to be the best for the tourism business in the last 10 years. Agarwal said post-Covid people want to enjoy their life and the hotel industry has been witnessing 100 per cent year-on-year growth since then. —PTI

Vishal Mega Mart's ₹8,000 crore IPO opens

On day 1, it secures ₹2,400 crore from anchor investors

NEW DELHI, 11 DEC

Supermarket chain Vishal Mega Mart has mobilised Rs 2,400 crore from anchor investors, an update with the exchange showed.

Those who were allotted shares in the anchor round included SBI Mutual Fund, Government of Singapore, Nomura Funds Ireland Public Ltd, Axis Mutual Fund (MF), HDFC MF and ICICI Prudential MF, according to a circular uploaded on BSE's website.

Overall, a total of 18 domestic mutual funds participated through 44 schemes, collectively accounting for 53.33 per cent of the anchor portion.

As per the circular, Vishal Mega Mart has allotted 30.76 crore equity shares to 89 funds at Rs 78 a piece, which is also the upper-end of the price band. This takes the transaction size to Rs 2,400 crore.

The Rs 8,000-crore initial public offering (IPO) of Vishal Mega Mart opens for subscription on 11 December and will conclude on 13 December. Shares are available in the price range of Rs 74 to Rs 78 apiece.

The proposed IPO is entirely an offer-for-sale (OFS) of shares by promoter Kedaara Capital-led Samayat Services LLP, Samayat Services LLP, with no fresh issue of equity shares.

As per the circular, Vishal Mega Mart has allotted 30.76 crore equity shares to 89 funds at Rs 78 a piece PHOTO: X

At present, Samayat Services LLP holds 96.55 per cent stake in the Gurugram-based supermart major.

Vishal Mega Mart's product range includes both in-house and third-party brands, covering three key categories -- apparel, general merchandise, and fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG). As of June 30, 2024, it operates 626 Vishal Mega Mart stores across India, along with a mobile app and website.

India's aspirational retail market was valued at Rs 68-72 trillion in 2023 and is projected to reach Rs 104-112 trillion by 2028, growing at a CAGR of 9 per cent. The shift towards organized retail is driven by higher quality expectations, wider product assortments, better pricing (especially in FMCG), urbanisation, and opportunities for organised players to grow. —PTI

One MobiKwik Systems IPO fully subscribed

NEW DELHI, 11 DEC

The initial public offering (IPO) of fintech company One MobiKwik Systems got fully subscribed within an hour of opening of the issue on Wednesday.

The initial share sale received bids for 2,16,17,852 shares, as against 1,18,71,696 on offer, translating into 1.82 times subscription, as per data available with NSE.

Retail Individual Investors (RIIs) subscribed 7.69 times, while the Non-Institutional Investors portion received 1.55 times subscription.

One MobiKwik Systems said it garnered Rs 257 crore from anchor investors.

The Rs 572-crore IPO is available for public subscription during December 11 to 13. The company has fixed the price band of Rs 265-279 per share.

The digital payments firm reported a consolidated total income of Rs 890.3 crore in FY24. —PTI

'WILL USE OWN RESOURCE'

Adani opts out of US funding for Lanka port project

NEW DELHI, 11 DEC

Billionaire Gautam Adani's group has pulled out of a loan deal with a US agency to fund a port terminal in Sri Lanka, saying it will use its own resources for the project.

In an exchange filing late on Tuesday, Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone Ltd (APSEZ) said the project "is on track for commissioning by early next year".

"The project will be financed through the company's internal accruals and capital management plan," the firm said. "We have withdrawn our request for financing from the International Development Finance Corporation (IDFC)".

The US IDFC had in November last year agreed to provide a USD 553M loan to support the development, construction and operation of a deep-water container terminal called the Colombo West International Terminal (CWIT) at the Port of Colombo in Sri Lanka.

As the project is nearing completion, Adani Ports, which holds 51 per cent of the venture, chose to proceed with the project without funding from the IDFC, officials privy to process explained. —PTI

PHOTO:X

Adani Group stocks decline

Shares of six Adani Group firms out of 11 listed companies declined in the mid-session deals on Wednesday, with Adani Green Energy falling more than two per cent. The scrip of Adani Green Energy slipped 2.46 per cent to Rs 1,147.30 apiece, Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone was down by 1.13 per cent, Adani Power (down 1.05 per cent), and Adani Total Gas skid by 0.33 per cent. —PTI

NEW RESPONSIBILITIES AHEAD

Sanjay takes charge as RBI's 26th Governor

MUMBAI, 11 DEC

Sanjay Malhotra on Wednesday took charge as the 26th Governor of the Reserve Bank of India.

Malhotra, a career bureaucrat, arrived at the central bank's headquarter this morning, where he was welcomed by senior RBI staffers.

The central bank confirmed Malhotra's appointment through a post on the microblogging site "X" and also shared a few pictures.

Malhotra, who recently served as the Revenue Secretary, signed the documents to take the charge of the important institution that performs a variety of roles.

Deputy Governors Swaminathan J, M Rajeshwar Rao, and T Rabi Sankar were present when he assumed charge.

Malhotra, an IAS officer of the Rajasthan cadre comes at the helm of RBI at a very critical juncture, where growth and inflation balance has "unsettled" as per his predecessor Shaktikanta Das.

As we have to be conscious of the fact that we do maintain continuity and stability, we cannot be stuck to it, and we have to be alert and agile to meet challenges.

-Sanjay Malhotra, RBI Governor

Under Das, the Reserve Bank maintained a status quo on key rates for 11 consecutive meetings over nearly two years as it prioritised to tame inflation. It also diagnosed the slow growth as a result of high inflation.

Malhotra is scheduled to interact with the press later in the day, where he may spell out his focus areas. —PTI

Zepto to launch 'Zepto Cafe' app next week: Aadit

NEW DELHI, 11 DEC

Zepto co-founder Aadit Palicha on Wednesday said the quick commerce platform's cafe offering, Zepto Cafe, will be launched as a separate app next week.

In a post on social networking platform LinkedIn, the young entrepreneur highlighted the rapid scaling of the cafe service which has motivated the separate offering.

"We're launching a separate app for Zepto Cafe next week! The team is shipping an MVP (minimum viable product) and iterating quickly, so it may not be perfect on Day 1, but it's worth it to launch fast :D

Zepto Cafe was launched in April 2022 as a division of Zepto, which itself was founded in July 2021 by Aadit Palicha and Kaivalya Vohra.

Last month, Zepto announced the expansion of its cafe service to major cities through more than 120 cafes at stores across Mumbai, Delhi and Bengaluru, and soon in Hyderabad, Chennai, and Pune. —PTI

Sensex, Nifty edge up in restricted trade ahead of US inflation data

MUMBAI, 11 DEC

Benchmark equity indices Sensex and Nifty closed higher in restricted trade on Wednesday as investors awaited key US inflation data for further cues.

The 30-share BSE Sensex rose by 16.09 points or 0.02 per cent to close at 81,526.14 as 17 of its constituents declined and 13 advanced. Snapping its three-day losing run, NSE Nifty advanced 31.75 points or 0.13 per cent to touch 24,641.80.

From the 30-share Sensex pack, Bajaj Finance, Nestle India, Bajaj Finserv, Asian Paints, UltraTech Cement, Infosys, Maruti, Bharti Airtel and Hindustan Unilever were among the gainers. JSW Steel, Adani Ports, NTPC, State Bank of India, Reliance Industries, Tech Mahindra, Axis Bank, Titan and HDFC Bank were the laggards.

The BSE smallcap gauge climbed 0.35 per cent and the midcap index gained 0.25 per cent.

Among sectoral indices, Consumer Durables rose 0.59 per cent, Industrials by 0.40 per cent, Auto by 0.37 per cent, IT and Teck by 0.35 per cent each and FMCG by 0.34 per cent.

BSE Sensex rose by 16.09 points or 0.02 per cent to close at 81,526.14 as 17 of its constituents declined and 13 advanced PHOTO: PIXABAY

Swiggy stock plunges 5 % amid profit booking, anchor lock-in ends

Shares of food delivery and quick-commerce major Swiggy plunged 5 per cent on the bourses on Wednesday as investors booked profits after the one-month lock-in period for anchor investors expired.

The scrip of the company declined 5 per cent each on the BSE and the National Stock Exchange (NSE) to Rs 515.95 and Rs 516.50 apiece, respectively. The market valuation of Swiggy dropped to Rs 1.16 lakh crore on the BSE.

Following the lock-in expiry, as many as 6.5 crore shares of Swiggy, or a 3 per cent equity stake in the company, became eligible to trade, opening the doors for the investors to go ahead and sell 50 per cent of their holdings. —PTI

'Blend commercial goals with political needs'

NEW DELHI, 11 DEC

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Wednesday stressed that India Inc's commercial considerations should blend with the economy, nation's priorities and strategic needs.

Asking the industry to "realign and reset" itself based on the lessons learnt in the last decade, Sitharaman said the supply chains should be widespread lest geopolitical risks disrupt it.

"Economic and commercial considerations today will have to blend (with) economy and its priorities with politics and strategic needs," Sitharaman said at the CII Global Economic Policy Forum 2024 here.

PHOTO:X

Outlining the priorities of the economy for the next decade, Sitharaman said the industry should work with small and medium enterprises to explore how they can support large units, while equally contributing to job creation.

Sitharaman said the attempt of both industry and governments everywhere should be to restore global calm and normalcy. There can nowhere be enough justifiable reason for skirmishes or war, she said.

Stating that benefits of economic success will be spread properly only through technology. India's Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI), ONDC (Open Network for Digital Commerce) and technology stack for agriculture have democratised access. —PTI

COCA-COLA SELLS 40 PER CENT STAKE IN BOTTLING ARM

NEW DELHI, 11 DEC

Global beverages major Coca-Cola has sold 40 per cent stake in its India bottling business Hindustan Coca-Cola Beverages Pvt Ltd (HCCBL) to Jubilant Bhartia Group.

Though the company has not disclosed the amount of the deal, media reports pegged it around Rs 10,000 crore.

"The Coca-Cola Company today announced that it has reached an agreement with Jubilant Bhartia Group, a multi-billion conglomerate with global presence in diverse sectors, to acquire 40 per cent stake in Hindustan Coca-Cola Holdings Pvt Ltd, the parent company of the largest Coca-Cola bottler in India, Hindustan Coca-Cola Beverages Pvt Ltd," the companies said.

PHOTO: X

These changes and investment represent a significant milestone for Coca-Cola as the company continues to pursue its purpose to refresh the world and make a difference, it said.

India is the fifth largest market of Coca-Cola globally. The firm is divesting bottling operations globally as part of asset-light strategy.

"This strategic investment represents an important milestone in our journey," CEO Juan Rodriguez said. —PTI

FOR FY25

ADB lowers India's GDP growth to 6.5%

NEW DELHI, 11 DEC

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) on Wednesday lowered India's economic growth forecast to 6.5 per cent for the current financial year from its earlier estimate of 7 per cent due to lower-than-expected growth in private investment and housing demand.

The multilateral development bank has also lowered India's growth forecast for 2025-26 financial year.

Changes in US trade, fiscal, and immigration policies could dent growth and add to inflation in developing Asia and the Pacific, according to the latest edition of Asian Development Outlook (ADO).

The report also said Asia and the Pacific's economies are projected to grow 4.9 per cent in 2024, slightly below ADB's September forecast of 5 per cent.

Changes in US trade, fiscal, and immigration policies could dent growth and add to inflation in developing Asia and the Pacific PHOTO: PTI

"India's outlook is adjusted downward from 7 per cent to 6.5 per cent for this year, and from 7.2 per cent to 7 per cent next year, due to lower-than-expected growth in private investment and housing demand," ADB said.

Last week, the Reserve Bank also significantly lowered the growth projection for current fiscal year to 6.6 per cent from 7.2 per cent earlier and hiked the inflation forecast to 4.8 per cent in view of slowdown in economic activity as well as stubborn food prices.

India's GDP growth fell to a 7-quarter low of 5.4 per cent in July-September period of current financial year 2024-25 as against RBI's own projection of 7 per cent.

The forecast for next year is unchanged at 4.7 per cent. The Manila-headquartered bank has kept growth forecast for China unchanged at 4.5 per cent for next year. —PTI

- The report also said Asia and Pacific's economies are projected to grow 4.9 per cent in 2024, below September forecast of 5 per cent

India's data centre attracts $60B investment since 2019

NEW DELHI, 11 DEC

India's data centre market has attracted investment commitment of USD 60 billion in the last six years and the cumulative inflow is estimated to surpass USD 100 billion by 2027-end, according to CBRE.

Real estate consultant CBRE South Asia on Wednesday released report '2024 India Data Centre Market Update'.

Between 2019 and 2024, India attracted investment commitments totalling more than USD 60 billion from both domestic and international investors, it added.

Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal emerged as the leading states in terms of cumulative investment commitments.

CBRE report anticipates "India surpassing USD 100 billion in cumulative investment commitments by the end of 2027".

India's data centre market is experiencing unprecedented growth, driven by a combination of rising digital consumption, government initiatives and significant investments from both domestic and international players, said Anshuman Magazine, Chairman & CEO - India, South-East Asia, Middle East & Africa, CBRE.

Mumbai continues to dominate data centre stock, followed by Chennai, Delhi-NCR and Bengaluru, accounting for 90 per cent of the country's total data centre stock as of September 2024. —PTI

- Maharashtra, TN, UP and WB emerged as leading states in investment commitments

Linde & Miller give South Africa 1-0 lead

DURBAN, 11 DEC

Having not played for South Africa for three years, George Linde made up for lost time on one electric Kingsmead evening with a stunning all-round performance. A 24-ball 48 with the bat and 4-21 with the ball battered a valiant Pakistan, who went down by 11 runs. The umpire even thought he had a hat trick in the penultimate over before a review denied him that glory but not his undisputed Player-of-the-Match award. Mohammad Rizwan, who faced the first ball, was there in the final over as his team went down fighting, a late attack from the captain not quite enough to undo the damage of a sluggish first half of an innings where he managed just 36 in his first 44 deliveries, even if he did finish with 74 off 62. Saim Ayub gave Pakistan a flying start despite the loss of Babar Azam for a duck early on, but South Africa reined them in through the middle overs. South Africa 183 for 9 (Miller 82, Linde 48, Shaheen 3-22, Abrar 3-37) beat Pakistan 172 for 8 (Rizwan 74, Ayub 31, Linde 4-21) by 11 runs—*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Vandana hopes Women's HIL will boost confidence

BENGALURU, 11 DEC

Star Indian forward Vandana Katariya believes the inaugural Women's Hockey India League will strengthen the talent flow to the national team, besides offering the players a never-before opportunity to "mingle with international players." Returning after a seven-year hiatus, the league, to be held from 28 December to 5 February, will feature a women's competition for the first time. "As everyone can see in the previous editions, the men's team got a chance to mingle with international players, raise their confidence levels and it has helped the team immensely and they are getting medals consistently now," Vandana said in a HIL release. "I expect the same effect when the Women's HIL begins with four teams this year.—*PTI*

FIFA Women's WC Brazil 2027 dates confirmed

DUBAI, 11 DEC

The FIFA Council met virtually ahead of the Extraordinary FIFA Congress and took several important decisions about FIFA competitions, while also taking note of the successful bidding process for the 2030 and 2034 editions of the FIFA World Cup™. In relation to the upcoming edition of the FIFA Women's World Cup Brazil 2027™, and following consultation with the Brazilian Football Association and the confederations, the Council confirmed that the tournament will be played from 24 June to 25 July 2027. —*PTI*

Fraser is recovering after hip replacement surgery

BRISBANE, 11 DEC

Former Australian swimming great and four-time Olympic gold medalist Dawn Fraser was recovering in a hospital on the Sunshine Coast north of Brisbane after she fell and sustained a broken hip and four broken ribs. The 87-year-old Fraser was convalescing after the "scary" incident last week that initially prompted fears she had suffered internal bleeding. Fraser, who had been recovering from recent eye surgery, tripped on the edge of the newly renovated driveway and landed hard on the ground. She was taken to hospital after the ordeal, where it was determined that repairing the damage to her hip was too dangerous, so she underwent full hip replacement surgery.—*PTI*

Gukesh & Ding draw in game 13 ahead of nail-biting finish

One last Classical Game left to be played tomorrow

SINGAPORE, 11 DEC

Gukesh settles for draw against Ding with white pieces in Singapore *PHOTO: X*

One last step away from success, one match for one player to take it all. Defending champion Ding Liren fought from behind to eke out a thrilling draw against young Indian Challenger D Gukesh in Game 13 of the World Chess Championship. 68 moves in the 13th and penultimate game. With one last Classical Game left to be played tomorrow.

After a scintillating win in the previous game, Ding was thrown off out the gate as Gukesh opened with a novel sequence to completely throw preparation out the window, as the two indulged in a true battle of intuition and wits.

Gukesh started off with a classic e4 opening as Ding opted to counter with the French defense. But, what started off as a seemingly common game went out of control within the first few moves as hungry Gukesh took everyone by surprise by presenting Ding with a position that had never been played out.The master's database had no games in the file from history after Gukesh's 8th move: 8 Be3, after which both players were scaling unchartered waters, something novel from the young Indian Challenger. Ding, yet again, plunged to his old ways, burning the midnight oil early on in the game, as the Chinese GM went almost 50 minutes behind on the clock, playing with less than an hour to stay alive within the 13th move.

Gukesh continued to pile the pressure on with his novel opening, but Ding, as he has throughout the match so far, got to counterpressure the Indian to slowly chip away at his clock as well.

Before they knew it, both players were once again level-pegging at the clock, as the time-wise odds were evened out.All was even up till Move 24, when Gukesh caught Ding in a moment of confusion, executing a brilliant Bf4, constricting Ding's rooks into a trap as the defending champion was pushed to the ropes.

An absolute rollercoaster of a middlegame and endgame ensued, as Gukesh and Ding threw haymakers at each other on the board, with both players fighting against the clock.

Despite Gukesh's continued prodding, Ding seemed to have tapped into his best self yet again with about 4 minutes left on the clock, finding the best move continually to build up his position, pushing the young Indian Challenger to his limits till both players reached the 30-minute increment.

The back-and-forth whittled both players down to a rook-pawn endgame as Ding played from behind to force the draw and Game 14 on Gukesh.—*PTI*

WORLD SQUASH TEAM C'SHIP

Anahat Singh beat Jessica Walt 11-9, 11-6 and 11-8 in her match to take a lead in the tie *PHOTO: PTI*

Indian women reach QFs after 12 years

BRISBANE, 11 DEC

The Indian women's squash team entered the quarterfinals of the WSF World Team Squash Championship after beating Australia 2-1 in Hong Kong, China on Wednesday.

Anahat Singh beat Jessica Walt 11-9, 11-6, and 11-8 in her match to take a lead in the tie. Nirupama Dubey ranked 206 in the world, lost 11-8, 8-11, 9-11, and 9-11 to Sarah Cardwell to level the tie at 1-1.

Akanksha Salunkhe then led her team into the final eight after beating Alex Haydon 11-8, 11-5, and 11-6 in the final match.

The last time the women's team made it to this stage was back in 2012 when the tournament was held in Nimes, France.

The men's team will face off against Malaysia later in the day for a spot in the last eight.

Former Asian Games medallists and National champions Harinder Pal Singh Sandhu and Joshana Chinappa are the coaches for the men's and women's teams, respectively. —*PTI*

Alcaraz has best of Nadal, Djokovic, Federer: Agassi

BENGALURU, 11 DEC

Andre Agassi *PHOTO: X*

Legendary Andre Agassi said Carlos Alcaraz combines the best qualities of Novak Djokovic, Roger Federer, and Rafael Nadal but cautioned the tennis world against expecting the Spaniard to repeat the incredible feats of the 'Fab Three.'

Federer, Nadal, and Djokovic have a combined tally of 66 Grand Slams, and Alcaraz, 21, has so far bagged four majors.

"I'm not a genius and I don't have a crystal ball. What I can tell you is Alcaraz defends like Novak, has power and spin like Nadal, and his hands and finesse like Federer," said Agassi during a talk session during the Marathon Mindset at the TiE Global Summit.

Agassi, himself an eight-time Slam champion, then outlined the reason to not place a massive load of expectations on Alcaraz. "Just because he has the best of all those three doesn't mean he can do what they did because there're so many other parts to the game, which mean decision-making, injuries, you know, luck," he said.

At 37, Djokovic too is closer to his retirement and Agassi said the Serbian will now find it even tougher to remain competitive in the absence of the retired Nadal and Federer.

"He's already done so much, so long, and it's hard to imagine longer.

I think he'll run out of the energy for it more than the capability of it, I would imagine. "It cannot be easy, especially when the people you came to the dance with have left." The American explained his thoughts further. "When Pete (Sampras) retired, it was a blow to me. It set me back a little bit.

It made me have to rediscover my inspirations on some level.

"And he's (Djokovic) lost the guys that he's made history with. So, it's probably emotionally going to get tougher and tougher quickly, but I would never bet against him. Bet against him at your peril," said Agassi.

To prolong his career, Djokovic hired former British player Andy Murray as his coach, and Agassi remained curious about the future of their alliance. —*PTI*

India suffers series whitewash to Australia

PERTH, 11 DEC

India failed to avoid a 0-3 whitewash against Australia after losing the third women's ODI by 83 runs here on Wednesday.

Chasing a daunting 299, Smriti Mandhana was the lone warrior for India as the tourists folded for 215 in 45.1 overs. Opening the innings, Mandhana scored 105 off 109 deliveries to anchor the run chase but didn't get support from other Indian batters. Star spinner Ashleigh Gardner starred with a five-wicket haul.

Earlier, Australian middle-order batter Annabel Sutherland (110) struck a fine century as the hosts posted 298/6 against India.

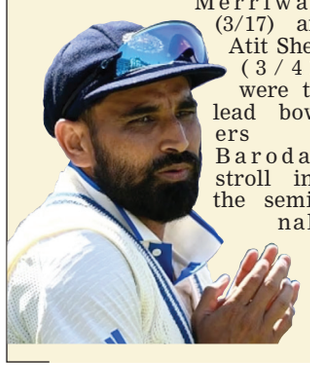
Ashleigh Gardner (50) and skipper Tahlia McGrath (56 not out) were the other Australian batters who made vital contributions. India's Arundhati Reddy grabbed four wickets, conceding just 26 runs in her 10 overs.

Brief Scores: Australia (Annabel Sutherland 110, Ashleigh Gardner 50, Tahlia McGrath 56 not out; Arundhati Reddy 4/26). India: 215 all out in 45.1 overs (Smriti Mandhana 105, Harleen Deol 39; Ashleigh Gardner 5/30) —*PTI*

SMA T20 QUARTERFINAL

Shami fails to impress as Baroda beat Bengal

Bengaluru 11 DEC



Pacer Mohammed Shami rarely operated at his best and it had a cascading effect on Bengal as they went down by 41 runs against Baroda in the quarterfinals of the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy here on Wednesday. Opener Shashwat Rawat top-scored with a 26-ball 40 (1x4, 3x6) as Baroda posted a competitive 172 for seven, and Bengal ended up with 131 all out despite Shahbaz Ahmed (55, 36b, 3x4, 4x6) playing a fine cameo. Skipper Hardik Pandya (3/27) along with his pace colleagues Lukeman Merriwala (3/17) and Atit Sheth (3/41) were the lead bowlers in Baroda's stroll into the semifinals.

Shami's outing was more in focus as the seasoned quick has been striving hard to join the Indian squad in Australia at least for the last two Tests of the ongoing Border-Gavaskar Trophy. His overall numbers ahead of this match were 11 wickets from eight matches at an economy rate of 7.8, but on this day Shami looked anything but sharp. He started with two wides in the first over and hardly looked in control of the proceedings for the rest of his spell. The 34-year-old clocked deliveries around 140 clicks across two spells and bowled a few yorkers, but generally struggled to zoom in on the stumps as he often does. Shivalik Sharma (24, 17b) clobbered him for two successive sixes, though one was an edge that flew behind the third man. Shami got two consolation wickets of Shivalik and Sheth towards the end when Baroda was trying to accelerate. Shami could not make any impact with the bat either falling for a two-ball duck to India teammate Pandya.

—*PTI*

Tan Kim Her *PHOTO: PTI*

Tan returns to India for a second stint

HONG KONG, 11 DEC

Malaysian doubles specialist Tan Kim Her has reunited with star pair Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty, starting his second stint in the Indian badminton landscape.

The 53-year-old has been roped in by the Badminton Association of India (BAI) for a four-year term till the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics.

"I am very happy to be back in India and get a chance to work with Satwik-Chirag and also the young and talented group of doubles players who have the potential to follow on the path of Satwik-Chirag," Tan said in a release. "I am looking forward to creating a bigger group of doubles combinations who can win tournaments at the world stage." Tan, who arrived in Hyderabad on Sunday. —*PTI*

BORDER–GAVASKAR TROPHY

Entire Australian top order is under pressure: David Warner

BRISBANE, 11 DEC

It's not just Usman Khawaja but the entire Australian top-order that is feeling the "pressure" despite the series-leveling win in Adelaide, reckons former opener David Warner.

While the under-fire Marnus Labuschagne found form with a resolute fifty, batting mainstay Steve Smith and rookie opener Nathan McSweeney continue to search for runs in the ongoing Border-Gavaskar Trophy.

"I think the pressure is on all the top order, not just 'Uzzie'," the former Australian left-hander was quoted saying by Fox Cricket.

Travis Head smashed a memorable hundred at home as Australia bounced back to level the five-match series after a crushing loss in Perth.

David Warner *PHOTO: PTI*

"Travis came out and counterpunched and scored a brilliant hundred, and we know he's capable of doing it. But it's everyone else around supporting that," said Warner.

"It's not just one player in particular, it's the top six scoring bulk runs and making sure you're giving rest to the fast bowlers. It was a fast-paced Test in the first game, but this last one was Mitchell Starc at his best as usual with the pink ball.

"Come, Brisbane, we need to see some big runs from the top order," he said about the third Test beginning here on Saturday.

McSweeney had a forgettable debut in Perth being trapped LBW by Jasprit Bumrah in both his innings for 10 and 0, while in Adelaide he managed 49 runs.

Khawaja has 34 runs in the first two Tests and in his last 16 innings, he has reached fifty only once. —*PTI*

Tim opens up on Head-Langer disagreement

Tim Paine has revealed that Travis Head and Justin Langer had differing views on batting, with the former coach prioritising defense, which limited the southpaw's natural aggressive style that has since brought significant success. Head's stunning 140-run knock powered Australia to a 10-wicket win over India in the second Test and level the five-match series 1-1. "I don't think either of them will mind me saying this, but he and JL used to have a real difference of opinion," Paine said on 'SEN Cricket'. "You've got Test greats in commentary and you've got a Test great (Langer) that's coaching and Graeme Hick at the time who'd scored 101 First Class hundreds as his batting coach (offering advice).

ICC CHAMPIONS TROPHY

PCB faces losses if it withdraws its team

KARACHI, 11 DEC

PHOTO: PTI

The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) could face revenue losses, lawsuits, and risk alienation from the cricket world if it decides to withdraw from the ICC Champions Trophy as deadlock persists with governing body ICC over the mode of organising the 50-over event scheduled in February-March.

A senior cricket administrator who is well versed with the organisation of ICC events told PTI on Wednesday that it would not be an easy decision for the PCB to not play in the Champions Trophy if their Hybrid Model formula is not accepted in its entirety by the ICC and Board of Control for Cricket in India.

"Pakistan has not only signed a host agreement with the ICC but like all other participating nations in the event it has also signed a mandatory members participation agreement (MPA) with the ICC," the administrator explained.

"It is only after a member nation signs the MPA for playing in an ICC event that it is eligible to get a share of revenues earned from ICC events. As part of the broadcasting deal, at least one Pakistan and India match has to be scheduled in all ICC events, said the administrator. "The estimated bid a broadcaster makes for a long-term deal with the ICC is only after he has calculated the estimated value of all matches involving all countries and it is no surprise that the broadcaster offsets his loss of revenues from other matches with the estimated earnings from selling commercial spots and other rights for the Pakistan and India fixture (s)." He said that besides lawsuits the Pakistan board also faces the risk of alienation as other boards currently are not supporting the PCB on their Hybrid Model formula. "PCB Chairman Mohsin Naqvi has to come clean on the whole issue. MPA's are the same for all countries and unless the PCB has kept some safeguard clauses in their host agreement with the ICC. —*PTI*

Mohsin Naqvi *PHOTO: PTI*

In India, I was dragged into fixing world: Lou

WELLINGTON, 11 DEC

Former New Zealand batter Lou Vincent has opened up on how he was drawn to the world of match-fixing during his time at the now defunct Indian Cricket League in the late 2000s, saying being part of a gang at that time gave him a sense of belonging as he battled depression.

Lou Vincent *PHOTO: PTI*

Vincent, who represented New Zealand in 23 Tests and 108 ODI, was handed 11 life bans by the England and Wales Cricket Board in 2014 for match-fixing. Last year, the ban was revised allowing him to be involved in domestic cricket. The 46-year-old had started his career with a Test hundred on debut against the mighty Australian side of the 2000s. As he fought depression and got involved in match-fixing, his promising international career came to a premature end at the age of 29.

In an interview with The Telegraph, Vincent narrated how his early upbringing impacted his personality and career. "So I didn't have the mental package to be a professional sports player. So at 28, I was deeply in depression and then went to India. —*PTI*